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THE
Metropolitan Tabernacle
Pulpit.

SERMONS PREACHED AND REVISED

BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

DURING THE YEAR 1878.

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TO
THE ONE GOD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH
IN
THE TRINITY OF HIS SACRED PERSONS,
BE ALL HONOUR AND GLORY
WORLD WITHOUT END,
AMEN.

TO THE GLORIOUS FATHER, AS THE COVENANT GOD
OF ISRAEL;

TO THE GRACIOUS SON, THE REDEEMER OF HIS PEOPLE;
TO THE HOLY GHOST THE AUTHOR OF
SANCTIFICATION;

BE EVERLASTING PRAISE FOR THAT GOSPEL OF THE
FREE GRACE OF GOD,
HEREIN PROCLAIMED UNTO MEN.

NOV 24
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1984

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Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A GOLDEN PRAYER.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, DECEMBER 30TH, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Father, glorify thy name.”—John xii. 28.

IN the first part of my discourse this morning I shall strictly keep to my text, as the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and endeavour to show what it teaches us with regard to him. These are his own words, and it would be robbery to borrow them until first we have seen what they meant as they fell from his lips. Their most golden meaning must be seen in the light of his sacred countenance. Then, in the second part of my sermon, I shall try to point out how the petition before us may be used by ourselves, and I pray that divine grace may be given us that it may be engraven upon our hearts, and that each one of us may be taught by the Holy Spirit daily to say for himself, “Father, glorify thy name.” I would suggest that these words should be to all the Lord’s people in this church their motto for another year, and, indeed, their prayer throughout life. It will as well beseem the beginner in grace as the ripe believer; it will be proper both at the wicket-gate of faith, and at the portals of glory. Like a lovely rainbow let the prayer, “Father, glorify thy name,” over-arch the whole period of our life on earth. I cannot suggest a better petition for the present moment, nor indeed for any moment of our pilgrimage. Let us close the old year with it, and open the door of the new to the same note. As for the past, “Father, glorify thy name;” in the present fulfil this desire unto thy servants, and in the future do it yet more abundantly.

I. Let us look, then, at the words, first of all, IN RESPECT TO OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. They occur in the following connection. He had wrought a notable miracle in the raising of Lazarus from the dead. The fame of the miracle had attracted many to hear him; enthusiastic crowds had gathered, and he had become so extremely popular that the Pharisees said, “the world hath gone after him.” The people were willing to have made him a king, and a great concourse met him with branches of palm trees and cried, “Hosanna; blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.” Our Lord passed in royal but humble pomp

through the streets of Jerusalem, riding upon a colt, the foal of an ass. This public manifestation, the renown of the miracle, and the general talk of the populace, led to strangers hearing of him, and enquiring about him; so that certain intelligent Greeks of a very respectable order—for their mode of address to Philip shows their superior behaviour—asked to be introduced to him. They would “see Jesus,” not of course merely *see* him in the street, for that they could do if they pleased without applying to Philip; but they would have an interview with him, and learn more about his teaching and his claims. I suppose that the sight of these Greeks greatly gladdened the heart of the Saviour, for he delighted to see men coming to the light. He seemed to say within himself, “Behold the nations come to me; the Gentiles arise and seek their Saviour.” He saw in those Greeks the advance guard of the Gentile world. He looked upon the strangers with delight, regarding them as representative men, the first of myriads who from the ends of the earth and the islands of the sea should come flocking to him, to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Our Lord rejoiced in spirit; his heart was glad within him, and he began to address himself to the people round about, and to the Greeks, who mingled with the throng. At that very moment the thought flashed across the Saviour’s mind, “But these nations who are to be born unto me, and to be saved by me, cannot be so born without birth-pangs, nor saved except I endure unspeakable suffering as their Redeemer.” This fact came vividly before our Lord’s mind, and it rushed over his spirit like a raging torrent. He saw that he could not become the seed corn of a great harvest unless first of all he should fall into the ground and die. He was the one grain of wheat upon whom all depended, and he must lose comfort and life, and be buried in the earth, or else he would abide alone, and bring forth no fruit. He saw the vicarious suffering which lay in his way, and his soul was troubled.

Do not imagine that our Saviour dreaded death in itself considered. He was far superior in sacred courage and strength of mind to any of his servants, and yet many of them have welcomed death, and others of them, such as the martyrs, have endured it in its most terrible forms, without fear, even expressing a holy delight in glorifying the name of God by their mortal agony. Our Lord was not less brave than these in prospect of his departure. But never let it be forgotten that the death of Christ was a very peculiar one, and in fact stands by itself alone. His death was the vindication of justice, it was the death of the sin-bearer, it was a sacrificial, substitutionary, expiatory death, and this is very different from the death of a pardoned and justified believer, who passes out of the world resting on the atonement, and supported by a sense of having been reconciled to God by the great sacrifice. Our Lord was called to bear the enormous load of man’s transgressions; over his holy soul the dark shadow of human guilt must pass, and on his sensitive spirit must be made to meet the iniquity of us all. His saints’ deaths are blessed in the sight of the Lord, but he must be made a curse for us that we might be blessed in him: and as the mind of Christ perceived this clearly lying in the way of that triumph among the Gentiles which gave him joy, there was a struggle in his soul, and before the assembled people that struggle was manifested. The Greeks

desired to see Jesus, and they did see him in a very remarkable matter, so that they must have been astounded at the sight. If they expected to see a king they did indeed behold a royal soul, but they saw him in such grief as falls not to the lot of common men. If they wished to see somewhat of his greatness of spirit and power of mind, they did see it, but it was a power which did not transfigure his face with glory, but filled it with an agony marring all its beauty. I shall not be too bold if I say that Gethsemane was rehearsed in public upon the occasion before us. Our Lord's soul was troubled, so he says. He felt a sort of adumbration or foreshadowing of that midnight among the olives, in which his soul was "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." It was out of that conflict that our text came: in fact, our text is to his suffering in the midst of the crowd what "nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" was to the agony of Gethsemane, or what "It is finished" was to the passion upon Calvary. It was the culminating point, the climax, and the conquest of a great mental battle; and when he had thus spoken he seemed to shake himself clear of the agony and to emerge from it with the memorials of it still upon him, but with his face set like a flint to go forward to the bitter and the glorious end, this being now his watch-word, "Father, glorify thy name."

I shall want to call your attention, dear friends, briefly here, first, to *the trouble of the Redeemer's soul*. I always tremble within myself when I try to speak of the inner conflicts of our blessed Lord, for it is so easy to make a mistake and darken counsel by words without knowledge. His person is complex and therefore we readily confuse, yet he himself is but one, and it is equally dangerous to make over-nice distinctions. Loving jealousy of our Lord's honour makes us feel that we scarcely know how to speak of him. I remember an earnest admirer of art who in pointing with his walking-stick to the beauties of a famous picture pushed his cane through the canvas and ruined it; and it is possible that in our enthusiasm to point out the beauties and points of interest in the life and death of our Lord we may spoil it all. I fear lest in my ignorance I should make sorrow for myself by dishonouring him for whose honour I would gladly lay me down and die. Help me, O divine Spirit! This much is clear, that our Saviour's heart was full of trouble. He who could still the sea and bid the storms retreat was tempest-tossed in his own soul, and cast about him for anchorage. He who could drive the fever from its lair, or send a legion of demons into the deep, was nevertheless troubled in spirit and cried, "What shall I say?" Master of all worlds, supreme amongst the angels, and adored at his Father's right hand, yet he confesses, "Now is my soul troubled." Lord of all, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered. How near akin it makes him to us! How human! How compassed with infirmity! Ye worship him, and rightly so, but still he is a man and a mourner. Ye call him Master and Lord, and ye do well, yet he not only washed his disciples' feet, but his own feet trembled in the rough places of the way. He felt those same commotions of spirit which make our hearts sad within us and cause us to pour out our souls within us. Do not think of the Lord Jesus otherwise than as of a dear brother born for adversity, or a faithful husband sharing all our lot, being bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. Did you cry out in anguish, "Now is my

soul troubled"? Then remember that your Lord has used the same words. Are you half distracted? Are you tossed to and fro in your thoughts? Do you ever ask, "What shall I say?" Jesus also understands by sympathy what it is you mean. Do you look around you and feel that you know not what to do, and does your trembling heart suggest that you should pray, "Father, save me from this hour"?—in all this you may see the Well-beloved's footprints—you are not upon a new and strange track, he leads you through no darker rooms than he went through before. With the like afflictions he has been afflicted; there is nothing in them novel or surprising to his sympathetic heart.

Beloved friends, let me invite you to consider that not only did our Lord thus suffer, but it is joyful to reflect that he suffered all this without sin. Hence it follows that mental conflict is not in itself sinful; even the shrinking back of the flesh from suffering is not necessarily evil; and the question "What shall I say?" and the apparent distraction of the spirit for the moment as to what shall be its course, are not in themselves criminal. There could be no sin in the Lord Jesus, and consequently there is not of necessity sin in our inward struggles, though I am very far from venturing to hope that in any one of them we are quite clear of fault. Our Lord's nature was so pure that however much it was stirred it remained clear; but in our case, though the stirring is not sinful, it sets in motion the sin which dwelleth in us, and we are defiled. Yet I do not believe that all those depressions of spirit which come of sickness, that all those wanderings of mind in the heat of fever, that all those shrinkings and drawings back from pain, which are essential to our humanity, are by our heavenly Father set down as sin, though sin is doubtless mixed with them. If they be sinful in themselves, yet surely they are blotted out as soon as written down, for "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." He pities rather than censures or condemns. Ye do not judge your children hardly for what they say when they are racked with pain or prostrated by weakness; you bear with their little fancies and peevishnesses, and the like, and you never taunt them with their follies afterwards: neither can I think that our heavenly Father would have us doubt our interest in Christ because in our semi-delirium we could not realize his love, nor would he have us question the grace which is in us because our feverish thoughts were near akin to despair. When the true heart struggles to love and trust and obey, but the poor brain is tortured with dark thoughts, the conflict is not all sinful, nor any of it necessarily so. There may be an awful struggle in the soul and yet the Father may be glorified; the sin lies not in the conflict but in the defeat, if defeat there be: the guilt is not in the shrinking from pain, but in permitting that natural feeling to hinder us from duty or to lead us to rebel against chastisement. "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me," is not a sinful utterance if it be followed by "nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."

I feel so glad to think our Lord when he was passing through this inward conflict spoke out his feelings. It is instructive that he should have done so, for with his strength of mind he was quite capable of preserving a self-contained attitude and keeping his agony to himself: yet you notice that neither here, in which case he spoke so that others

heard him; nor at Gethsemane, in which case he took three of his disciples to be with him, and went to them again and again for sympathy; nor even on the cross, in which case he cried aloud: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" did he endeavour to conceal his emotion from others. It may be that by this he intended to teach us wisdom; he would show us by his own example that it is well for us not to be too much shut up within ourselves. Smother not your sorrow, tell it out, or it may gather an ungovernable heat. That is the worst of grief which cannot weep or moan. Draw up the sluices, give a vent to pent up feeling: even though it be but a child who hears your tale it will relieve your mind to tell it. Anything is better than banking up the fires, and concentrating all the heat within the soul. Act not the stoic's part; be not ashamed to let it be known that you are a man, a man who can grieve and be troubled even as others. It may sometimes be well to follow the poet's advice who says—

"Bear and still bear and silent be,
Tell no man thy misery,"

but I question if the occasions are very frequent. At any rate, such is not the command of our Lord, nor does his example point in that direction.

In himself speaking out, our Lord gives us a full permit to speak too. We might have said, "No, I will not tell what is going on within, lest my weakness should seem to dishonour God." Now, we know that our Lord did not dishonour the Father by saying, "Now is my soul troubled," and by revealing the inward conflict of his soul; neither will the fact of our speaking out our grief necessarily dishonour our God. Jesus wept, and we may weep. Jesus told out his sorrow to his friends, and you may do the same.

In thus speaking, our Lord affords us the best of help, for his fellow-feeling is a grand support. Did he say, "Now is my soul troubled"? and did he scarce know what to ask? But did he at the last still triumph and resign himself into the Father's hands? Then, girt about by the selfsame power, we also will encounter the same sorrow after our measure, and endure until we triumph as he did. Even though in the triumph there should be clear evidence of our personal weakness, yet we will not regret it, since by that means our God shall be the more surely glorified by the more distinct revelation of *his* power.

I will say no more about the trouble of our Redeemer, because I would now ask you to fix your thoughts for a minute upon *the firm resolve* which the text sets forth. There is a battle, but from the very first moment to the last of it there is really no question in the Saviour's mind about what he means to do: his purpose was settled beyond disturbance. The surface of his mind was ruffled, but deep down in his heart the current of the Redeemer's soul flowed on irresistibly in the ordained channel. He was even straitened till he had been baptized with the appointed baptism. Observe the question raised, and see how really it was answered in his heart before he asked it. "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour." Must men be unsaved and Jesus be delivered from the lowering storm? If so, yonder Greeks need not ask to see him, for there will be no "life in a look" at him. The disciples round about need not cling to him as

their helper, for there is no help in him, unless he dies to redeem the sons of men. Shall men, then, be unredeemed? Shall the blood of atonement be unspilt, and no man be ransomed from going down to the pit? Shall he remain alone, the grain of wheat unsown? If he doth, he will be happy enough and glorious enough, for heaven is all his own. Doth he need men to make him blessed? Does he require worms of the dust to make him glorious? Should he remain alone, he will still be God and Lord. But, shall the death penalty be left to be borne by men, guilty men, who deserve to bear it? Shall there be no cross, no Calvary, no open tomb, no resurrection, no gates of heaven set wide open for coming souls? There is the question, and you see in the text how resolutely Jesus had settled it. He says in effect—"Father, glorify thy name by my death; for this purpose have I come to this hour, that by my agony and bloody sweat, by my cross and passion, I may redeem the sons of men. Redeemed they must and shall be, cost me what it may. I have resolved to bear the penalty, and magnify thy law, and I will perform it, though hell itself be let loose against me and all its waves of fire dash over me. I will endure the cross, and despise the shame, to honour thee, my Father."

Observe right well that the text indicates *the deep intent* which steadied our Lord's resolve. Why is Christ resolved to die? Is it to save men? Yes, but not as the chief reason. His first prayer is not, "Father, save my people," but "Father, glorify thy name." The glory of God was the chief end and object of our Saviour's life and death. It is that the Father's name may be illustrious that Jesus would have souls redeemed. His passion had for its main intent the exhibition of the attributes of God. And, brethren, how completely he has glorified Jehovah's name! Upon the cross we see the divine justice in the streaming wounds of the great Substitute: for the Son of God must needs die when sin is laid upon him. There also you behold infinite wisdom, for what but infallible wisdom could have devised the way whereby God might be just and yet the justifier of him that believeth. There, too, is love, rich, free, boundless love—never so conspicuous as in the death of man's Redeemer. Till this day it still remains a question concerning the atonement which of the letters best is writ, the justice, the wisdom, or the love. In the atonement the divine attributes are all so perfectly glorified that no one crowds out the other: each one has its full display without in the least degree diminishing the glory of any other. Our blessed Lord, that the Father might be glorified, pushed on to the end which he had set before him. Whatever conflict might be within his spirit, his heart was fixed upon bearing to the death our load, and suffering to the end our penalty.

Now, brethren, I will detain you here with but one other thought—it is this, *the grand result* which came of it was that God was in very deed greatly glorified, and to this fact special testimony was given. A voice was heard out of heaven saying, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." That voice speaks of the past: the incarnation of Christ had glorified the name of God. I am unable to describe to you how much of lustre the love of God receives from the fact of the Word being made flesh and dwelling among us. It is the mystery of mysteries, the marvel of all marvels, that the Creator should

esponse the nature of his creature, and that he should be found in fashion as a man. Oh, Bethlehem, thou hast exceedingly magnified the condescension of God. Angels might well sing, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill towards men." Nor Bethlehem alone, but Nazareth, and the thirty years which our Lord spent on earth all illustrate the condescension, the pity, the longsuffering of God. Did God dwell among us thirty years? Did he abide in humility in the carpenter's shop for the best part of that time, and did he afterwards come forth to be a poor man, a teacher of peasants, a friend of sinners, a man of sorrows, despised and rejected of men? Could the holy and the just, the infinite and the glorious thus, as it were, compress infinity into so small a space, and marry deity to such poverty and shame? It was so. Then tune your harps anew, ye seraphs, to tell the amazing love and condescension of "Immanuel, God with us." Well spake that voice—"I have glorified it." But hearken yet again, for it adds—"and will glorify it again." To my mind that word "again" sounds like certain voices I have heard in the Alps. The horn is sounded and then follows an echo; nay, twice, thrice, and perhaps fifty times the music is distinctly repeated, the voices following each other in gradually melting strains. The metaphor is not complete, for in this case the echoes increase in volume; instead of diminishing they wax louder and louder. Lo, Jesus hangs upon the cross and dies, and God is glorified, for justice has its due. He lies in the grave till the third morning, but he bursts the bonds of death. Lo, God's great name is glorified again, since the divine power, truth, and faithfulness are all seen in the resurrection of Christ. Yet a few more days and he ascends into heaven, the Man, the God, and a cloud hides him from our sight,—he hath glorified the Father's name again by leading captivity captive. Then cometh Pentecost, and the preaching of the gospel among the heathen, and then is the name of God glorified by the outpouring of the Spirit. Every conversion of a sinner, and every sanctification of a believer, is a fresh glorifying of the name of the Father, and every reception of a perfected one into heaven—and surely they are entering heaven every day, troops of them climbing the celestial hills, drawn upward by almighty love—everyone, I say, in entering into Paradise glorifies Jehovah's name again. And, brethren, by-and-by, when the whole earth shall be filled with his glory, then will the Father glorify his own name again. When in his own time the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the trump of the archangel and the voice of God, and when he shall reign amongst his ancients gloriously, and we shall hear the gladsome acclamation, "Hallelujah, hallelujah, the Lord God omnipotent reigneth," and when cometh the end, and he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God even the Father, and God shall be all in all—then shall the eternal echoes roll along the glories of the great Father God. The glorious name of the one Jehovah shall through all space and all eternity be magnified, and the prayer of our once suffering but now exalted Saviour shall be fully answered, "Father, glorify thy name."

II. Now, brethren and sisters, we will use our text IN REFERENCE TO OURSELVES. May the Holy Ghost direct us in so doing. I pray that this text may be our prayer from this time forth, "Father, glorify thy name." Have you, dear hearers, ever prayed this prayer? I trust I

am addressing many to whom it is a very familiar desire, and yet I question if any here have ever presented it so earnestly as those from whom it has been forced by suffering and grief. God's birds often sing best in cages; at any rate, when they have been loose a little while, and their notes grow somewhat dull, he tunes their pipes again if he puts them away awhile and clips their wings.

Now this text, as far as we are concerned, whenever we can use it, indicates *conflict ended*. Sometimes we are in such a condition that we do not know which way to turn. We are in great affliction; it may not be so much outward trouble as distress of mind, which is worst of all. The water has leaked *into* the ship, and that is worse than an ocean outside. The vessel begins to fill, you use the pumps, but cannot keep it under. At such times you cry, "What shall I do? What shall I say? Where can I look? I am oppressed and overwhelmed." But there is an end of the conflict when you turn round and cry, "Father! Father!" A child may have lost its way and it may be sobbing its heart out in its distress; but the moment it sees its father it is lost no longer, it has found its way, and is at rest. Though there may be no difference in your position, nor change in your circumstances, yet if you catch a sight of your heavenly Father, it is enough; you are a lost child no more. When you can pray, "Father, glorify thy name," then there is no more question about "What shall I say?" You have said the right thing, and there let it end.

Now, brethren, concerning this next year upon which we are entering, I hope it will be a year of happiness to you,—I very emphatically wish you all a Happy New Year,—but nobody can be confident that it will be a year free from trouble. On the contrary, you may be pretty confident that it will not be so, for man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. We have each, beloved friends, some dear faces in which we rejoice, may they long smile upon us: but remember each one of these may be an occasion of sorrow during the next year, for we have neither an immortal child, nor an immortal husband, nor an immortal wife, nor an immortal friend, and therefore some of these may die within the year. Moreover the comforts with which we are surrounded may take to themselves wings before another year shall fulfil its months. Earthly joys are as if they were all made of snow, they melt even as the hoar frost, and are gone before we conclude our thanksgiving for their coming. It may be you will have a year of drought and shortness of bread; years lean and ill favoured may be your portion. Ay, and yet more, perhaps during the year which has almost dawned you may have to gather up your feet in the bed and die, to meet your father's God. Well now, concerning this approaching year and its mournful possibilities, shall we grow gloomy and desponding? Shall we wish we had never been born or ask that we may die? By no means. Shall we on the other hand grow frivolous and laugh at all things? No, that were ill-becoming in heirs of God. What shall we do? We will breathe this prayer, "Father, glorify thy name." That is to say, if I must lose my property, glorify thy name by my poverty; if I must be bereaved, glorify thy name in my sorrows; if I must die, glorify thy name in my departure. Now, when you pray in that fashion, your conflict is over, no outward fright nor inward fear remains: if that prayer rises from the heart, you have now cast aside all gloomy forebodings, and you can thoughtfully and

placidly pursue your way into the unknown to-morrow. Pass on, O caravan, into the trackless desert! Still proceed into the wilderness of the future, which no mortal eye hath seen, for yonder fiery cloudy pillar leads the way and all is well. "Father, glorify thy name," is our pillar of cloud, and, protected by its shade, we shall not be smitten by the heat of prosperity; "Father, glorify thy name," is our pillar of fire by night, nor shall the darkness of adversity destroy us, for the Lord shall be our light. March on, ye pilgrims, without a moment's delay because of fear. Tarry not for a single instant, this being your banner and your watchword, "Father, glorify thy name." Torturing doubts and forebodings of the future all end when the glorious name is seen over all.

Secondly, our text breathes a spirit which is *the surrender of self*. When a man can truly say, "Father, glorify thy name," he begins to understand that saying of our Saviour concerning the corn of wheat falling into the ground and dying, for that prayer means, "Lord, do what thou wilt with me. I will make no stipulations, but leave all to thee. Remember that I am dust, and deal tenderly with me, but still glorify thy name. Do not spare me, if thereby thou wouldst be less glorious. Act not according to my foolish wishes or childish desires, but glorify thy name in me by any means and by all means." The prayer means—I am willing to be made nothing of, so that thy will may be done. I am willing to be as one dead and buried, forgotten, and unknown if thou mayest be magnified. I am ready to be buried and sown because I believe that this is the way by which I shall grow and bring forth fruit to thy praise.

This surrender includes obedient service, for our great Master goes on to say, "If any man serve me, let him follow me." True self-renunciation shows itself in the obedient imitation of Christ. "Father, glorify thy name" means waiting the Lord's bidding and running in his ways. If the petition be written out at length it runs thus,—“Help me to copy my Saviour's example, help me to follow in his blessed footsteps! This is my desire; passively to honour my heavenly Father by bearing his will, and actively to glorify him by doing his will. Lord, help me to do both of these, and never let me be forgetful that I am not my own, but wholly my Lord's.”

The prayer appears to me to be most properly used when it is made a personal one—"Father, glorify thy name *in me*. I am the recipient of so much mercy, get some glory out of me, I pray thee." Beloved, I think you must have noticed in this world that the man who really lives is the man who more than his fellows has learned to live for others and for God. You do not care for the preacher whose object is to display his own powers, you go away dissatisfied after hearing his bravest orations; but if any man shall only desire your soul's good and God's glory, you will put up with much eccentricity from him, and bear with many infirmities, because instinctively you love and trust the man who forgets himself. Now, what you thus see in preachers I beg you to try and consider in yourselves. If any of you are living for yourselves you will be unloveable; if you even act under the ambition to be loved you will miss your mark; but if you will love for love's sake, if you will seek to be Christ-like, if you will lay yourselves out to glorify God, to increase his kingdom, and to bless your fellow men, you will live in the highest and

noblest sense. Seek not your own greatness, but labour to make Jesus great, and you will live. Christians live by dying. Kill self and Christ shall live in you, and so shall you, yourself, most truly live. The way upward in true life and honour is to go downward in self-humiliation. Renounce all, and you shall be rich; have nothing, and you shall have all things. Try to be something, and you shall be nothing; be nothing, and you shall live; that is the great lesson which Jesus would teach us, but which we are slow to learn. "Father, glorify thy name" means let the corn of wheat be buried out of sight, to lose itself in its outgrowth. O self, thou art a dead thing, be thou laid deep in the sepulchre. Thou rotten carcase, for such thou art become since Jesus died for me, thou art an offence unto me! Away with thee! Do not poison my life, mar my motives, spoil my intents, hinder my self-denials, and defile the chastity of my heart. Thou dost prompt me to make provision for the flesh: away with thee, away with thee! "Father, glorify thy name."

In our text, in the next place, *a new care is paramount*. The man has forgotten self, and self is buried like a grain of wheat, but now he begins to care for God's glory. His cry is, "Father, glorify thy name." Oh, if you can get rid of self you will feel at your heart a daily intensified longing to have the name of God glorified. Do ye not sometimes feel sick at heart as ye gaze upon this present generation? My soul is pained within me often when I see how everything is out of joint. Everything is now denied which from our youth we have regarded as sacred truth. The infallibility of Scripture is denied; the authenticity of one portion is challenged, and the inspiration of another called in question, and the good old book is torn to pieces by blind critics. Eternal verities against which only blaspheming infidels used to speak are now questioned by professed ministers of Christ. Doctrines which our sires never thought of doubting are now trailed in the mire, and that by those who profess to be teachers of God's word. "Father, glorify thy name" comes leaping to our lip because it is burning in our heart—burning there in holy wrath against the treachery of men. Indignation arises from our jealousy, and our eager spirits cry, "Oh, that God would glorify his name!" To many of us this is our heaviest care.

Brethren, we desire the Lord to glorify that name in ourselves by preventing our impatience in suffering, and keeping us from faintness in labour. We beseech our heavenly Father to destroy our selfishness, to cast out our pride, and to overcome every evil propensity which would prevent his getting glory out of us. Our soul is even as the clusters of the vine which belong to the owner of the vineyard: our whole nature is as the fruit for which the great vinedresser waits. Here fling me into the wine-vat; let every cluster and every grape be gathered and pressed. Great Lord, cast me into the wine-vat of thy service, and then express from me every drop of the essence of life. Let my whole soul flow forth to thee; let the ruddy juice burst forth on the right and on the left; and when the first rich liquor of my life is gone, then even to the utmost lees let me be pressed, till the last drop of the living juice which may bring glory to thee shall have come forth of me. Fling all away that will not turn into thy glory, but use all that can be used: to the utmost glorify thy name. O thou great Father of my spirit, the care of thy child is to glorify thee, for if thou be a father thou shouldst have

honour of thy children. "Honour thy father" is the first commandment with promise, and it is precious in our eyes. From our inmost hearts we pray, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come."

Now, see how *that care is divested of all sorrow* by our casting it upon God. The prayer is not "Father, help me to glorify thy name," but it is "Father, glorify thy name"—thyself. Thy glory is too much for me to compass, do thou glorify thine own self. In thy providence so arrange my position and condition as to glorify thy name. By thy grace so sustain me, and sanctify me, that I may glorify thee. I cannot do it, but thou canst, and the care which I was glad to feel I am glad also to bring by faith to thee. "Father, glorify thy name."

And now, brethren, if you can pray in that fashion *your confidence will come back to you*; if you have been greatly distracted, calm peace will visit you again, for now you will say, "I will bear the Lord's will, and will be content therewith. I cannot quarrel with my Master's dealings any more, for I have asked him to glorify his name, and as I know that he is doing it I cannot murmur. How can I struggle against that which is really glorifying my Father? Your heart will cease to question and to quake, and nestle down beneath the eternal wings, in deep and happy peace. Filled with patience, you will take the cup which stood untasted, and grasp it with willingness if not with eagerness. "It is to glorify God," you say, "every drop of this cup is for his glory;" and therefore you put the chalice to your lip and drink straight on, and on, and on till you have drained the last drop, and find that "It is finished." I know you will not fail to do this if your soul has really felt the power of this prayer—"Father, glorify thy name." Why, sometimes it seems to me that it were worth while to pray to be burned at a stake, quick to the death, if by martyrdom we could glorify God. I could not desire such a death, and yet from one point of view I have often envied martyrs those ruby crowns which they cast at the feet of their dear Lord. How honourable in them to have glorified God by so much suffering. Surely he is the grandest creature God has made who glorifies him most. And who is he? Not the tall archangel of whom Milton sings, whose wand might make a mast for some great admiral, but the most insignificant nobody who has laid long upon her bed of weariness, and there has praised the Lord by perfect patience:—she, though apparently the least, may be the greatest glorifier of the Father. Perhaps the tiniest creature God has made will bring him more glory than leviathan, that maketh the deep to be hoary and causeth the waters to boil like a pot. That which most thoroughly yields itself to God, that which most completely annihilates itself into the eternal All—is most glorifying to him. May God of his infinite mercy bring us to this self-annihilation, this care for his glory only. Strive after it, beloved, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

One word to those of you who will have no sympathy with this sermon. You know that hymn in which the enquirer asks

"If I find him, if I follow,
What reward is here?"

and the answer is

"Many a labour, many a sorrow,
Many a tear."

Very discouraging this, is it not? You who look for mirth and selfish pleasure turn away in disgust. Yet the lines are very true. Jesus himself said, "Except a man take up his cross and follow me, he cannot be my disciple." But mark you, the day will come when those who were willing to suffer for Christ will be counted to be the only sane persons who ever lived, and when those who looked to the main chance, and cared for self, and disregarded God, and faith in Christ, and love for their fellow men, will be regarded as having been mere idiots and drivellers. Hear ye this parable. It is spring time, and yonder is a farmer walking the furrows and sowing his seed. Those who know nothing of husbandry mock at him for his wastefulness with his grain. He is far too prodigal of good food. He is the wise man, is he not, who locks his granary door and preserves his corn? Why should he go and fling it into the cold, thankless mould? Wait ye till the end of June, when the bloom is on the wheat. Wait ye till July and August have brought the months of harvest, and you shall see that he who gave his wheat to die shall, amidst the shouts of "Harvest home," be reckoned to have been wise and prudent; while he who kept the door of his granary bolted, through his sluggishness and selfishness, shall then be seen to be only fit for Bedlam, for he has no harvest save a mass of tangled weeds. Scatter ye, scatter ye your lives for others! Give yourselves up to Jesus. He who in this respect hateth his life shall find it, but he that keepeth it shall lose it. Still, O ye ungodly, if ye live to yourselves, God will yet have glory, and even glory out of you. Ye shall not rob him of his honour, nor tear a jewel from his throne. God will be glorified by you and in you in some form or other. Your everlasting lamentations, because of your great selfish mistakes, will vindicate the wisdom and the justice of God to all eternity. In a future state, though ye gnaw the flesh of your right arms for very anguish and sorrow and passion, you will be obliged to own that the warnings of the gospel were true, and that God is just. Your well deserved griefs shall help to make up the burden of that song which shall eternally celebrate the wisdom and goodness of God, for you will have to confess that Jesus was right and you were wrong; that to believe in him and to be his disciple was the right thing; and that to despise him, and to live unto yourself was what he told you it would be—namely, destruction and ruin. God grant his blessing for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John xii. 12—41.

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"—1 Corinthians iv. 7.

THE Corinthian church was exceedingly gifted. Perhaps no other church of the period had in it so many persons of education and talent. The apostle says of them, "In everything ye are enriched, in all utterance and in all knowledge, so that ye come behind in no gift." Alas, its grace was not in proportion to its gifts, and consequently a proud spirit was developed in the church, which manifested itself in divisions and contentions. Parties were formed. One said, "I am of Paul," and probably prided himself on the depth of his thought. "I am of Apollos," said another, and probably gloried in the brilliant eloquence of his language. "I am of Cephas," cried a third, and boasted in the plain, unvarnished practicalness of Peter's teaching. "You are all wrong," exclaimed a fourth, "and I will have nothing to do with you. I am of no sect and no system, for I am of Christ, and exclude you all, because I wish to promote love and unity." Party leaders are sure to be found where there is a party spirit; and party spirit is a fungus which grows upon the dunghill of conceit. The apostle grieved greatly to see that the brethren had no discipline, could not keep rank, and were not content to work under any body or with one another. He lamented that each man wanted to be foremost, and he was so ashamed of them that he thanked God that he had baptized none of them. Probably the adherents of the various parties had only used their leaders' names to make a sect in order that they themselves might be made the more prominent. They gloried in men that other men might glory in them. From all this may we as a church be preserved. May God grant that, whatever gifts and talents we may have, we may always be filled by his good Spirit so abundantly that we may walk in all lowliness of spirit and abide in hearty, loving union with each other.

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Our apostle displayed great wisdom in his rebuke of the Corinthians. He did not cry down their talents; he did not say that it was altogether a thing of no value to be able to argue, to be able to preach, to be able to discern spirits, or to be able to speak with tongues. This is a mode of procedure which suggests itself very readily, but it is not a good one. You very seldom lower a man's opinion of himself by undervaluing his gifts. He knows that you are treating him unfairly, and he naturally resents the injustice, and becomes more proud than ever. He remembers the fable of the fox and the sour grapes, and is fully persuaded that you only decry his abilities because you do not possess them yourself. Pride is not to be cured by injustice: one devil will not drive out another. Pride often finds fuel for itself in that which was intended to damp its flame; the man who is undervalued feels that if his gifts are despised by others, he knows their value himself, if nobody else does, and he has another reason for considering himself to be a person of superior abilities. The apostle follows a far more sensible course; he does not deny the talent, but asks where it comes from; he does not irritate, but cuts deep while he asks one or two questions, which strike at the very root of self-esteem. In effect these questions were as follows: "If you are a superior person, and a man fit to be a teacher of others, whence did you obtain this superiority? If you are different from the common people, who makes you to differ? If you are a person of remarkable gifts, how came you to possess them? If all your distinguishing abilities are gifts from God, why do you boast? Why do you exalt yourself? What have you which you have not received? Now, if you received everything as the gift of divine charity, why do you glory as if you had not received it?"

These questions may well hide pride from man, and I pray that such may be the result upon our minds while at this time we pursue the train of thought suggested by the text. To this end we shall need the assistance of the Holy Ghost, for nothing is more difficult than to overcome our self-conceit. Pride takes a thousand forms and hides itself under numberless disguises. Many talk of lowliness, but humility still remains among the rarest of jewels. Many take a pride in what they call having no pride about them. It is very easy to be proud of not being proud, and perhaps some brethren here are in that condition. Perhaps we have ourselves said, "No, we are not such fools as to boast." That is not boasting, I suppose! "I could not be vainglorious," says one; "I know too much of my unworthiness to give myself airs, and ride the high horse." Quite so, my friend, and yet at the bottom of such a speech there may lie a world of self-confidence; in fact, your humble confession may be only another form of blowing your own trumpet. It is easy to be proud while sneering at pride, and to glorify self while denouncing all self-exaltation. There was great truth in Plato's observation when Diogenes trampled on his valuable carpets and said, "I trample upon the pride of Plato?" "Yes," said Plato, "and with greater pride." There be some who are never more ostentatious than when they cry down all display, and never more insolent than when opposing insolence. Pride is a subtle serpent-like vice, it will insinuate itself into the most secret chamber and hide in the most unlikely places; it will speak like an angel of light, and cringe and fawn and display a mock modesty which might almost deceive the

very elect. It will blush and be diffident and hesitating, while all the while Lucifer himself is not more puffed up. To deal blows at this vice of vanity we shall meditate upon our text and pray God to bless it to us. First, we shall note that the verse contains *a great and comprehensive truth*; and, secondly, we shall observe, as God shall help us, *the teaching which may be derived from it*.

I. Our text contains within itself A GREAT AND COMPREHENSIVE TRUTH, namely, that whatever advantages we any of us possess over our fellow men we have received from God. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." "The living God giveth us richly all things to enjoy." "He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." Everything that we are which is not sinful, and everything that we have which is worth having, we owe to the bounty of our God.

And this is true, first, as to all sorts of *temporal advantages*. Begin at the very lowest : we owe our physical strength and personal comeliness to the Lord alone. Some persons are born with a fine frame, well knit, healthy, vigorous, strong, fitly proportioned ; and others exhibit a beauty of person and countenance which gives them great influence and wins much admiration. One of the commonest vices in the world, and one of the most silly, is the propensity to boast in mere animal force or physical beauty, whereas the man had no hand in making one single bone or muscle or sinew of his frame ; nor has the fairest daughter of Eve been the creator of her own loveliness. No credit is due to the strong man for his strength nor to the beautiful for their beauty. Strength and beauty are gifts, not virtues. There are some who consider the strongest man to be the best, and measure themselves by their capacity to lift weights, or to inflict blows, forgetting that horses and elephants can bear greater loads, and lions and tigers can be fiercer in fight. Mere force belongs to beasts and to steam-engines even more than to men and a man of gigantic strength is outdone at every step by the commonest machinery. As for beauty, one of its most potent charms lies in its modest unconsciousness ; it is greatly marred when accompanied by vanity. It may seem natural that a peacock should expand its tail in self-admiration, for the bird knows no better, but for a man or woman possessed of reason to gaze in the glass and admire their own bright eyes, and glossy hair, and delicate features, is contemptible vanity. Lovely is the modesty which does not even think of itself, but like the sweetly perfumed violet hides itself among the leaves, to be sought out by those who have pleasure in lowly worth. O fine lady, why so haughty ? Didst thou make thyself ? Then be proud of thyself. O strong athletic man, why so arrogant ? Art thou thine own creator ? Didst thou, O man, or woman, give thyself strength or comeliness ? Those legs of a man so swift for running, has the runner fashioned them himself ? Those eyes of woman, so bright for fascination, did she kindle their wondrous light herself ? No, these personal advantages are evidently gifts distributed at the divine pleasure. The Lord has made one athletic while another is born a cripple, one is uncomely and another fair as beauty's self. We meet with persons who are born blind, or deaf and dumb, or deformed in limb, or weak in spine, and therefore we see that our vigour of physical frame is the gift of Providence. To each favoured one we may say

“What hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?”

Position, too, in this world is a thing very commonly boasted of. This man is born with a silver spoon in his mouth: another man comes into the world, with nothing silvery about him. The first man boasts because he is a gentleman, and has come of a wealthy family: but what had he to do with that? What determined the place of his birth? What but a providential arrangement altogether apart from himself? And after all in the matter of birth we are all pretty much upon a level if we trace our pedigrees to their common meeting-place in the father of all living. Among the numerous kinds of pride this is one of the most ridiculous,—the boast of blood and vaunting of ancestry. What can there be of all inherited position and rank for which we can claim merit? However great the privilege no credit is certainly due to those who have it, for we may say to each one, “What hast thou which thou hast not received?”

Some men are vainglorious because they claim to have made their own position: we have even heard them say that they made themselves. I observe that persons who boast of being self-made usually worship their supposed maker with great fervency, and endeavour to lead others to pay the same homage. But I would ask such, “Who gave you the opportunity to become what you have become? Whence came that natural talent and force of character which have brought you to the front?” The “self-made man” can only be so called in a very restricted sense, or else the speech is false and blasphemous. If a man hath prospered, his prosperity has come of God’s kind permission—“The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich”; and if he hath fought his way up from penury and obscurity to dignity and position among the sons of men, he owes it to the gentleness of God, who “raiseth up the poor out of the dust.” Education, the gift of prudent parents, and opportunity, the boon of providence, have united to make the man prosperous: what has he that he has not received?

Some also glory in their talent and knowledge; but here again, if a man addicts himself to the nobler pursuits of science and learning, and renounces the more grovelling ambitions of mere wealth and station, endeavouring to search out the secrets of nature so as to become useful to his fellow-men, if he shall succeed and shall rise to be numbered with great master minds, has he not received it all? From the first, were there not natural predilections and propensities and talents and capacities bestowed upon him which have been denied to others who have been equally industrious, but could not in the nature of things become equally eminent? Whence also has come the health which has enabled the student to persevere in laborious research? Many have been slain by their devotion to their books. The brain is very sensitive, and many in burning the midnight oil have consumed the oil of life at the selfsame time; to whom, then, does the successful student owe his continued mental vigour? The greatest philosopher may wisely thank God that he is not a lunatic. Many a time, it may be, in the pursuit of knowledge he has in the straining of his faculties come very near to the overstraining of them. “Great wits to madness often are allied,” and frequently only the merciful interposition of heaven has spared the deep

student from the madman's fate. What has he that he has not received?

As to wealth, whereof some are apt to indulge a vulgar vanity, what is there in it, after all? Certainly it is to a man's credit that he did not in the commencement of his life squander his money in wanton waste and self-indulgence; it is to a man's credit that he put his shoulder to the wheel and toiled on, and did not consume his days in idleness, or fall into habits of drunkenness and dissipation, which are the roots of nine-tenths of the poverty in the land; it is to his credit that he has been economical, and so has kept the wolf from the door, and risen to a competence: but still, what has he that he did not receive? These very habits and discretions may be traced to training, or to force of mind, or to happy example, and they are, therefore, things received. As for the man's success, it is not alone due to industry, for sickness or accident might have made him unable to earn his bread, or dearth of employment might have hampered him. An ill turn in trade would have swept away his little capital, or, trusting in others, he might have found himself robbed of all. Are there not many who are industrious and prudent and all that, and yet nothing seems to prosper with them, or if they do have a little season of prosperity it is soon over? They have not, perhaps, all the wit of some, and therefore become the prey of sharpers, nor have they all the vigour of mind which is needful in these days of competition. Alas, some have grown rich by wickedness and have heaped up curses for themselves, but as far as wealth is a blessing no man possesses it apart from God's goodness. What saith the Scripture? "Thou shalt remember the Lord thy God; for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth." If any man will sit and down and trace up his progress in life, he will say of each of his mercies, "This also cometh to me of the goodness of the Lord; it is he who has prospered me. I might have exerted myself as I have done, but except the Lord had built the house they who built it would have laboured in vain; except the Lord had kept the city the watchmen had wakened in vain. Even if I have laboured as in the very fire, and risen early and sat up late, yet all would have come to nought unless his own good hand had been with me." Let us remember this, and never indulge the pride which robs God of his praise. It would be a sad thing if we were to become as besotted as ungrateful Israel, of whom the Lord said, "She did not know that I gave her corn and wine and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold."

Nor is it alone that for the power to get we are indebted to the Lord, for the retaining of our substance is equally of his favour. Riches take to themselves wings and fly away, and the rich man may be on a sudden stripped of all his treasure. Houses are soon plucked down unless the Lord do keep them. For the continued supplies of our need let us thank the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits.

O man of learning, it is the Lord that giveth thee power to acquire knowledge, else had thine efforts all been fruitless, and thy mind would have proved to be a barren waste. All faculty, capacity, attainment and influence come of him. It is he that giveth thee power, if thou art a member of the Christian church, to take a high position in it and to become a leader of others. If thou hast any experience by which thou canst comfort the afflicted, if thou hast any knowledge of his word by

which thou canst instruct the ignorant, if thou hast the Spirit of God resting upon thy utterance to convince and arouse, to confirm and to edify, if in anything thou art favoured to bless the church and the world, thou owest this also to the great Giver of all good. Bless him therefore and boast not.

If any man be prepared to deny our doctrine we may leave him to his own ungrateful pride, but let him tremble lest, like Nebuchadnezzar, he should be stripped of all power to glory, and made in his fall to acknowledge the hand of the Lord. You shall always find that men upon their knees, if they are sincere, bless God for all they have; and the better a man grows, and I will venture to add, the more common sense he gains, the more ready is he to trace all that he has, and is, to the good hand of his God. Certainly, the more grace he has, and the more he becomes like his God, the more earnestly does he disclaim any credit for himself, and the more sweetly does he sing the psalm, "*Non nobis domine*"—"Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but unto thy name give glory." Like Paul he cries, "By the grace of God I am what I am." We have thus set forth the great general truth, which holds good as to all temporal advantages.

I believe it to be an equally sure truth as *to all gracious privileges*. The apostle says, "Who maketh thee to differ?" Now, my brethren, those of us who have been saved by divine grace do differ from others. We differ greatly from what we used to be, we differ sensibly from ourselves in our former state; and we differ also greatly from others who are still unregenerate, for if the grace of God did not make our character to be different from that of the ungodly, where would be its value? The Lord has taught us what others do not know, he has quickened us with a life which others do not feel, he has given us a sorrow which the world has never felt, and, blessed be his name, he has endowed us with a joy with which worldlings cannot intermeddle. There is a very great difference between him that feareth God and him that feareth him not. "Now, who maketh thee to differ?" is the question to be thought of this morning by every saved one.

I believe that the doctrines of grace would never be doubted if men would follow this question to its legitimate conclusions. How came I to be different from other men if I be so? It has been by the hearing of the gospel as the means, but I must ascribe it to divine grace, and not to chance, that I was born where the gospel was preached, and not left under the influence of Popery or heathenism. There is distinguishing sovereignty in the birth of one man in London and the birth of another in Timbuctoo. Neither individual had anything to do with that most important item in his career. You might have been born in the kraal of the Hottentot instead of in the midst of a family of believers in Christ. The very privilege of hearing the word you must thankfully acknowledge to be a gift from the hand of God. Others even in your own country may not have been equally favoured, for they may not have had such earnest parents, nor have heard so earnest a minister. You were placed where many have been converted; it may be in the country or in London you were early carried to listen to a man whose way of putting the gospel was warm-hearted and affectionate, and likely to be owned of God. There, again, is the sovereignty of God to be seen,

that one should be found under a cold, dead ministry, and another should hear a soul-saving preacher. Yet further, there were some who heard the same sermons as you did and were not converted, and you were. How came that about? Will you take the glory of it? Were you better disposed? Was there something in your nature superior to that of others. It is true you did pay more earnest attention, but why? What led you to do so? Was there some natural betterness about you? No, dear friend, you will not dare to say so: at any rate, if you said so in the heat of controversy, you would not repeat it on your knees. No Christian will say, "Lord, I was better than other people, and therefore I am saved and they are not." No, in prayer we are all Calvinists, and all agree to ascribe the whole of the praise to the grace of God. "Who maketh thee to differ?" has but one answer from Christian people. It is the grace of God that has done it.

The apostle next owns that we possess many blessings, but declares that we have received all of them from God. Is that true? Let us enlarge upon the question. I speak only to professed believers in Christ. You had at first conviction of sin: did that arise spontaneously or did the Spirit convince you of sin? Repentance towards God,—was that wrought in you by the Holy Spirit, or was it the outgrowth of your own free will? You have faith: I venture to ask you if that faith is the gift of God? If it be not, I advise you to get rid of it, for it will never save you, for the faith which saves the soul is always spoken of in Scripture as the gift of God. Since your conversion you have exhibited some measure of holiness, but was that wrought in you by the Spirit or is it the fruit of your natural excellence? Who is to have the praise of it? You have grown in knowledge,—have you been taught of God, or did you teach yourself? If you were your own teacher, I know what kind of scholar you had. They say that when a man is his own lawyer he has a fool for his client, and it is very much the same when a man is his own teacher in divine things. You have also gained experience, you have felt love to Christ, you have burned with zeal; were these good things the gifts of God to you, or do you claim credit for them as having sprung up in your heart, as weeds grow in a garden without sowing or watering? Ah, dear brother, I know there is no exception to this rule among the children of God, they all confess that their graces have been received of the Lord. Whatever their doctrinal views and sentiments let them but speak with God in prayer or praise, and they will all say, "It was all thy work as far as it was good, and unto thee be all the honour of it from the first to the last. Thou hast wrought all our works in us." Friend, if your grace did not come from God it is worthless: but if it did come from the Lord let him have the glory of it, and do not boast as though you had not received it.

I want to call your attention to the way in which the text is worded. It is not said, "Who made thee to differ?" but "Who maketh thee to differ?" Who distinguishes thee now? It was God who made thee to differ at the first: that we all admit: who makes thee to differ now? Suppose thou wert left to thyself, couldst thou continue in thy state of grace? Suppose the grace of God were gone, what would become of thee? Is there one man among us who could keep his own soul alive so long as it takes for the eye to twinkle if God's upholding Spirit were

withdrawn? Is there any folly, is there any fault, is there any crime into which the best saint here would not soon plunge if it were not for the restraining grace of God? Who dare trust himself? What is it that makes us continue to differ from the very worst but the grace of God? And who shall make us to differ in days to come? To whom do you look for your future preservation? Are you your own keepers? Do you hope that you yourselves unaided shall persevere in the road to heaven? Ye are not, I trust, so presumptuous. Between this spot and yonder golden gates there will be battles in which we shall surely be slain unless Jehovah shall cover our heads: there are wilderness places into which we shall be sure to wander and lose ourselves for ever unless the Shepherd of Israel shall lead us like a flock. We know that it is so from past experience and present consciousness. The longer I live—and I think it is so with most Christians—the more I feel that everything must be of grace from first to last if I am to be saved. Grace chose us and grace redeemed us, grace calls us, grace renews us, grace preserves us, and grace must perfect us, or else nothing will come of all our hopes and desires: our religion will all be a flash in the pan, a disappointment at the last, and a failure for ever.

To-day I stand here to say that, if I have served the Lord from my youth up, he led me into his ways; if I have preached his gospel faithfully to the utmost of my knowledge, it has been because his grace has urged me thereto; if any souls have been won to Christ, if a church has been built up, if young preachers have been encouraged, if the savour of the gospel has been spread abroad, for these things and all else that has been done I disclaim even the shadow of credit. I loathe the bare thought. Unto God alone be the honour; he hath worked in me to will to do of his own good pleasure. When I bear this personal testimony I feel quite sure that every brother and sister here according to his position and condition will agree with it in his own case. If there be any virtue, if there be any praise, if there be anything that is honest or of good repute, unto the Lord, and unto the Lord alone, be the praise. If we be without these things the fault is our own: if we have no grace, if we have not obtained mercy, if we are still unbelievers and disobedient, on our own heads must rest the responsibility and the sin: but this by no means contradicts the present truth that if there be aught of goodness in us it is the workmanship of him who began to save us and will not cease from his work till he has finished it. Thus then have I spoken of the great general truth.

II. Now we come to ITS TEACHINGS. The first teaching of this great truth is that which we have already enlarged upon. It is useful as a *rebuke to pride*. If any brother be filled with vanity let him answer the question, "Who maketh thee to differ?" True, thou art no more a drunkard, but why shouldst thou boast of thy sobriety? Is it not thy duty? True, thou art no more the companion of evil doers, but who was it that took thee out of their company and gave thee a new heart and a right spirit? What is it that keeps thee out of the ways of the wicked at this moment? It is true thou knowest something of the things of God, whereas others are blinded, and the world lieth in the wicked one; but who opened thine eyes? What sayest thou? Thou wast born blind as they were; who opened thine eyes? Didst thou bring light to thine own soul? Think of what you used to be. Let any one of us look back

to our first estate, and we shall surely be compelled to lay our finger on our mouth and silence every boast for ever. Think of what we should be if grace left us ; how a hasty temper would soon ruin some of us, how natural levity would carry others of us off our feet ; how depression of spirit would lead some to despair, and carelessness would draw others to presume ; how in many ways our besetting sin would overthrow us, if it were not for the preserving grace of God. Brethren, if we say concerning anything in us that is good, "This is mine, and I congratulate myself upon having produced it," we are robbers and liars. Acknowledge that what you have is received from God ; own that it belongs to the great Giver, and that you yourself belong to Christ, and you may take the comfort of every good gift you have ; but once say, "This is no gift : it is my own,"—you are uttering falsehood, and you are acting a knavish part in defrauding the great King of his lawful revenue of praise. Yes, and you are also acting the part of an idolater, making yourself into an idol and lavishing incense to please your own foolish vanity. God grant that from a sense of being beggars, and nothing but beggars, daily receiving alms at the gate of mercy, we may be led to behave ourselves in his presence and amongst our fellow men with all lowliness of spirit. "Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it ?"

Secondly, this great truth becomes *an excitement to gratitude*. If all I possess I have received, and if all I am is due to the distinguishing grace of God, then let me bless the Lord in the depths of my soul. Silence is often the noblest form of worship ; I delight to sit before the Lord and feel that unspeakable mercy can only be acknowledged by unspeakable thankfulness. O God, if thou hadst left me where I was, if thou hadst left me to go on in sin, what might I have been by now ? What a servant of the devil, what a well-tutored tempter of others should I have grown to be ! Into what shame and disgrace might I have fallen ! By what frightful habits might I have been enthralled ! Some of you, my dear hearers, would have been dead long ago if it had not been for the grace of God, for you were killing yourselves by sin ; some of you would have been damned long ago if grace had not stopped you, for you were riding steeplechase to hell, and did not go at a common prudent pace, as many do, along the broad road. Oh, I say again, what might not some of us have been by now if the Lord had not stepped in with his preventing and converting mercy ! Let us, therefore, while we bless him quietly in the depths of our own soul, yet oftentimes overflow with praise, such as men may hear. Let our hearts flow over, for surely they are full. It is a good thing to spill a bowl of gratitude on an ungrateful man's floor, to make him feel that if he does not bless God others will do so, and will not be ashamed to do it to his face.

This gratitude should take the shape of continual obedience. Nothing which Jesus bids us do should be hard to us ; and nothing that he has bidden should lie forgotten. When we were in bondage under sin we thought if the Lord did but forgive us we should become the most warm-hearted and loving servants in his employ. When I had the irons on my wrists, and when I sat in sackcloth and ashes in the thick darkness of despair, if anyone had said to me, "The Lord will have mercy upon you and make a minister of you," I should have replied, "Then I will preach with all my

heart and soul." I should have hoped to preach a hundred times better than I have ever done. If it had been put to any one of you, do you not think you would have said, "I will serve him with my whole being. Redeemed by his blood, pressed to his bosom as a dear, returning child, clothed in the best robe, with a ring on my finger and shoes on my feet, I will live to my Father's praise, ay, live with such intensity that even apostles and martyrs shall not excel me." You have not done so, my friend, but the text calls you and me to do it, and suggests to us a gratitude which shall manifest itself in effort, and glow in every action of our daily life.

Again, my text has another teaching. It is *a reminder of responsibilities*. God has made a great difference between you and others in many respects, and given you a great many blessings; and forget not that where much is given much will be required. If you have ten talents, have you brought in the tenfold interest? If you possess five talents, have you brought in the fivefold return? It is to be deeply regretted that some of those who have the most ability to do good are doing the least. There are men with large wealth who do not give half as much as many with straitened means. I know persons of great attainments in spiritual knowledge who do not teach one half so much as newly converted lads and girls, who occupy their posts in the school right earnestly, and teach what little they know. I regret to say it, that those who could fight best are often the last to go to battle, and those who could plough best most often leave the ploughshare to rust, while feeble hands are worn to the bone. Brother, I will not deny that you have much knowledge, nor question that you have much experience, nor debate with you your right to be our superior; but if you be so, be so good as to excel us in consecration, in self-denial, in earnestness, and in holiness. In estimating our personal character, let us not so much calculate what we could be, as what we are. Let us not so much consider what we might be if we would, but what we really are doing for the Lord, for that is the matter of most importance. You may be a well of water, but you will get no credit for it at the last; the reward comes for the cup of cold water that was given to a disciple in the name of a disciple. You may be a great bale of cloth, but you will get no honourable mention for it at the last great day; the commendation will be to those of whom the Lord shall say, "I was naked, and ye clothed me." You may have a fat larder and a fine buttery, but the honour shall only come to you at the last if it can be said, "I was an hungered and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me drink, sick and in prison, and ye visited me." God grant we all may think of our responsibilities, so that you who could take long strides may not be satisfied to walk like little children; that you who could do a giant's work may not be satisfied with attempting that which might be creditable enough in a dwarf, but is not at all worthy of your greater powers.

Learn another lesson. The truth before us is a *suggestion of great tenderness in dealing with others!* Allow me for a minute to press that consideration upon you. "Who maketh thee to differ?" Who but a gracious God has renewed your heart? Yet you met the other day with a man fast bound with bad habits, and you said, "Nothing can be done with such a wreck of man. I will not waste words upon him." Another day you heard of an effort made in the back slums among the lowest of the low, and you said, "I do not think much can come of it." Now, my dear friend, "Who maketh thee to differ? What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" It would be better to drink into the spirit of holy John Bradford, whose window looked upon the road to the gallows at Tyburn, and as from day to day he saw poor condemned prisoners carried in the cart to die, he was wont to say, "There goes John Bradford but for the grace of God." If you feel so, let me ask you why cannot the grace of God cause others to fear God as well as yourself? Cannot the grace of God make other sinners to believe in Jesus as you do? I have never despaired of the salvation of any man since the Lord saved me. I know no heart that God cannot win if he could conquer mine. If you believe in your heart the precious doctrines of grace, you cannot be hopeless of any, but you must be ready to hope for those in whom there is nothing to encourage expectation. We ought never to look for desert in others, since the Lord did not look for desert in us. If Jesus loved us when there was no reason in us for that love, we ought just as freely to love our fellow men.

The last lesson is not for the Christian. It is for any of you here who wish you were saved. The text is *an encouragement for seekers*. You have begun another year, and you are yet unsaved? But still you do desire, if it be possible, to become children of God. Now, do you know an eminent Christian? "Yes," say you, "I do." Perhaps it is your revered grandmother, or it may be some earnest Christian minister. You greatly admire those people, do you not? Now remember that there is nothing good in them but what they have received from God. The Lord can give the like grace to you, and you can receive even as they have received. Do you believe that? It is true whether you believe it or not. The Lord in his abundant mercy can give to you what he has given to the best of his saints, whoever you may be. "Then what have I to do?" says one. What you have to do is, according to the text, to be a receiver. That is all—and that is the easiest thing in the world. Anybody here can be a receiver. When you go past the offering box for the College, perhaps some of you cannot be givers, however much you may wish to be; but if I were to put a man at the door with a shilling or a guinea for each one, anybody could receive it if he chose. Reception is a faculty which belongs to us however low we may sink.

When a person is covered with rags, covered with filth, covered with disease, he can still become a receiver; and even if he cannot stretch out his hand, he can find ways and means for receiving. Receiving implies neither strength, nor merit, nor wisdom. It requires no power, no faculty, no virtue, no anything; the power to be a receiver dwells with the weakest of the weak and the worst of the worst. The emptier you are, the more room there is for reception; the blacker you are, the more room to receive washing; the fouler you are, the more reason to receive cleansing; the more sick and near to death, the more room to receive healing. Wilt thou have the blessing which God in Christ Jesus is ready to give? If thou wilt be saved hearken to the voice of God and live! If you are willing to accept his Son Jesus Christ as thy Saviour, and from this time forth put thine whole trust in him, thou shalt be saved. May he of his grace lead thee now to become a receiver, for it is written, "As many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God; even to them that believe on his name." Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Romans iii. 9—27.
Ephesians ii. 1—13.

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SPEAK FOR YOURSELF. A CHALLENGE!

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“He is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself.”—John ix. 21.

THOSE of you, dear friends, who were present this morning will remember that our subject was “Jesus Christ himself.”* We dwelt upon his blessed person. Our faith is fixed on him; our affections are drawn to him; our hopes all bend toward him. Though everything he said or did is precious, yet Jesus himself stands first in our estimation. To know him, to believe him, to love him, is the very essence of our Christianity. To-night we change our theme. There is a “himself” in our text this evening—a “himself” ’tis true of a much humbler order. How stand we each one for himself? Our individuality and the personal responsibilities which fall upon ourselves in reference to Christ must not be lost sight of. If, for instance, a spiritual miracle has been wrought upon us, if we are obliged to confess—nay, if we are delighted to confess—that he has opened our eyes, then we are bound, especially those of us who are of ripe understanding, who may be said to be of full age, we are bound to bear our own personal testimony to him. The allegation and the appeal may alike apply to each one of us, “He is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself.” Jesus Christ *himself* bore our sins, as we heard this morning. He gave *himself* for us, he served us, not by proxy, but by personal consecration; not by alms doled out pitifully, but by his life surrendered as a sacrifice to God cheerfully. Has he thus commended his love to us, what less can we do in return than bear our own brave, bold, personal testimony for him?

What a parallel there is between this man’s case and our own. He had suffered from a grievous, personal evil. He was born blind. So we were born in sin. Sin has cast its blindness over our faculties from our very birth. We shall never forget the midnight of our nature. We could not see even the beauties of Christ himself, though resplendent

* No. 1,388. “Jesus Christ himself.”

as the sun at noonday, so blind were we. This man was personally delivered from his ailment, and so have we been delivered, I trust. I know many here who can say that, whereas they were blind, now they see. You have received, as the blind man did, a personal blessing, being endowed with sight. The blemish that blighted your life has been healed. It is not that somebody sees for you, and tells you what he sees, but you see for yourself. It is not merely imputed to you that you see, because you have been told what somebody else saw. Now you have no proxy in the matter, no sponsor in the business. You yourself are conscious that a work of grace has been wrought upon you, whereas you were blind now you see, and you know it. The blind man was cured through personal obedience to Christ's command. He heard a special call addressed to him—"Go, wash in the pool." He went, and came seeing. And many here present have heard the voice which says, "Believe and live," and it has come to you, not as a general exhortation, but as a special direction. You have believed and you do live. You have washed, and you have come seeing. Well now, all this is personal, therefore your Lord and Master has a right to expect a personal testimony from you of his power to save. You are of age. When any ask you, I trust you will speak for yourself. Speak up, and speak out for your Master without hesitancy or fear.

I. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN SAVED MEN ARE POSITIVELY COMPELLED TO SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES. They must of necessity bear their personal witness.

What else can they do when friends desert them? Father and mother were quite willing to own this young man—that he was their son—quite willing to bear their witness that he was born blind, but they would not go any farther. They could have gone farther if they liked, but they were afraid of that sentence of excommunication which the Jews had already agreed upon: that if any man did confess that Jesus was the Christ he should be put out of the synagogue. So, feeling very little compunction in declining to take any responsibility themselves, for they had great and probably well-founded confidence in their son's power to take care of himself, they did, as it were, abandon him. They threw upon him the stress and onus of giving a plain answer, which would have incurred such obloquy. They backed out of it. They had no wish whatever to become the subjects of persecution because their blind son had been blessed with sight. The young man who had been blind must therefore do battle himself for the good Lord who had bestowed so great a benefit on him. "Ask him," said his parents, "he will speak for himself."

There are times with many young people when their parents, if they do not frown upon their religion, at least turn the cold shoulder to them, and show no sympathy with their faith or their feelings. Some of us are rejoiced when our sons are converted. We are not ashamed to stand by them and to defend them and to protect them whatever may come of it. But there are fathers and mothers who themselves have no liking for the things of God, and so their children, if they are converted, have a hard time of it. I have known even some who profess to be disciples of Christ hold back very suspiciously, and leave others to champion the Master's cause when it has come to a hard push. In a

conversation you expected to hear that old gentleman speak up bravely for the truth of the gospel, but he did not. You knew he was a member of a Christian church, yet he very cautiously held his tongue for a long time, and then quietly said something about not casting pearls before swine. Probably he had not got any pearls, or possibly he was a swine himself. How else could you account for such awful cowardice? But one has known in youthful ardour what it is to be compelled to come out so defiantly as to risk the charge of presumption, because everybody else seemed to be deserting the doctrine it was his duty to defend. It is lamentable how many seem afraid of being compromised themselves. "Ask him; ask him; he will speak for himself," is their puny pretext; while they prudently retire behind the bushes out of rifle range, never coming forward unless, perchance, you should win the victory, when they would most likely come up to share the spoils. Whenever a man is placed in such a condition that he finds himself deserted in the battle for Christ by those who ought to be at his back, then let him disdain retreat, and say right gallantly "I am of age: I will speak for myself. In the name of God I will bear my witness."

Christian men, however reserved and backward their natural disposition may be, are compelled to speak out when they are very much pressed. These Pharisees took this man and questioned him rather closely. They put questions to him by way of examination and cross-examination. "What did he do to thee? How opened he thine eyes?" and so on. He does not appear to have been disturbed or disconcerted by the questions. He acquitted himself grandly. Self-contained, quiet, shrewd, immovable, his mind was made up, and with a thorough mastery of the situation, he was ready for them. He did not hesitate. Well now, I trust if ever you and I are brought to book, and questions are put to us, even though it be with intent to entangle us, we shall never be "ashamed to own our Lord or to defend his cause." Surely we might expect to be smitten dumb if we were ever abashed to speak of Christ when we are adjured to do it. If it comes to a challenge, "On whose side am I?" shall I ever hesitate to say, "I am with Immanuel, the crucified Saviour"? If ever they get us into a corner and say, "Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth," oh may God give us grace to be prompt and not think twice—"Of course I was, and of course I am still. He is my Friend, my Saviour, my all in all; and I never blush to own his name." Christians must come out and bear each man for himself a clear and distinct testimony.

When others revile and slander our Lord Jesus Christ it becomes imperative on us to commend and extol him. They said to this man, "Give God the praise. We know that this man is a sinner." Then he spoke right gratefully with a heart bubbling up with thankfulness. "He hath opened my eyes." "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." But when they went the length of saying, "As for this fellow, we know not from whence he is," he spoke up more heroically still. He turned upon his assailants and twitted them with their marvellous ignorance, "that ye know not from whence he is," and he fought for his Master so trenchantly that they were fain to throw away the weapons of debate and take up stones of abuse with which to stone him. Oh, if they speak ill of Christ, shall we be quiet? Docs

the oath make our blood chill, and shall we never have a word of rebuke for the blasphemer? Shall we hear the cause of Christ denounced in society, and for fear of feeble man refrain our tongue or smooth the matter over? No, let us throw the gauntlet down for Christ and say at once, "I cannot and I will not refrain myself. Now the very stones might speak. When my dear friend—my best of friends—is thus abused, I must and will proclaim the honours of his name." I think Christian people in this country do not take half the liberty they might. If we speak a word of religion or open our Bibles in a railway carriage or anything of that kind, they say, "cants!" They may play cards, I suppose, in a public conveyance with impunity: they may make night hideous with their howlings, they may utter all sorts of profanities and sing lascivious songs at their sweet will, but we are cants forsooth if we take our turn. In the name of everything that is free we will have our turn. And every now and then I like you to sing to their annoyance one of the songs of Zion, for they sing the songs of Babylon loud enough to annoy us. Let us tell them that while we live in a land of liberty, and rejoice that Christ has made us free, we shall no more be ashamed of his testimonies than they are ashamed of their iniquities. When they begin to sin in private and blush to utter a lewd word, then may be the time—nay, and not even then—for us to keep our religion to ourselves.

Thus you see there are times when men—quiet, reserved men—must speak. They will be traitors if they do not. I do not think this blind man was at all talkative. The brevity of his replies seems to indicate that he was rather a sententious speaker; but they drove him to it. He was like the stag at bay. He must fight, however gently disposed. And I think there is scarcely a Christian man that has been able to go all the way to heaven, and yet quietly hide himself, and run from bush to bush, skulking into glory. Christianity and cowardice! What a contradiction in terms. I think there must have been times when you have felt inclined to say to yourself, "Well now, cost what it may: I may be tabooed in society; I may be ridiculed by the rough, and I may lose respect among the polite; but for Jesus Christ and for his truth I must bear witness." Then has it come true of you, "He is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself."

II. We pass on to another remark. IT IS ALWAYS WELL TO BE PREPARED TO SPEAK FOR YOURSELF. This man was evidently ready to do so. When his parents said, "Ask him: he shall speak for himself,"—I think there was a little twinkle of the father's eye as he spoke,—meaning to say, "You will catch a Tartar. He *can* speak for himself. We have known him a good many years while he has been blind and he has always had a pretty sharp reply for anybody that thought him a fool; if you imagine now that you will get much out of him, by way of food for your mirth or fun, you are mightily mistaken. He will be more likely to spoil you than you to spoil him." And as they handed him over to the inquisitors, though they were unkind, I suppose they did not feel that he was a tender chicken that needed much of their care; so they seemed to say, "He is of age, he has come to years of maturity; ask him. *Only ask him.* He will speak for himself, we warrant you." And so indeed he did. Now I want to have a band of Christian people here

much of that sort—who when asked anything about their holy faith can so answer that they are not likely to be often the butts of ridicule and scorn, because they shall prove more than a match for their adversaries. But how, you will be ready to ask, are we to be prepared to speak for ourselves?

On the outset it is well to cultivate *a general habit of openheartedness and boldness*. We have no need to intrude and push ourselves into people's way and so become a nuisance and a bore to them. Far from it; but let us walk through the world as those who have nothing to conceal, conscious of the integrity of our own motives and the rightness of our heart before God; not needing to wear armour and sleep in it like the knights of old, knowing rather that truth unarmed is the best apparel. Let us show that we have nothing to cloak or cover, nothing to disguise or keep dark—that the gospel has wrought in us such an honesty and frankness of spirit that no blab can make us blush, no foe can cause us fear. Let us tell what we believe as true, because we can vouch for its verity. Let us choke those who cavil at these things, not so much by our combats as by our character. Let us prove to them that we have a solid reason for our simple protest; that we have actually received the grace in which we earnestly believe. Our words will have weight when they see that the fruit of our piety accords with the flower of our profession. There is great power in this manner of answering the adversary.

Take heed however, when you do speak, *to be sure of your ground*. This man was. "Whether he be a sinner or no," says he, "I know not;" so he offered no opinion on a subject of which he could not be quite positive. But where he had hard fact on his side there was nothing vague in his statement—"One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." This is an argument which the most astute caviller would find it difficult to answer. As the blind man looked them full in the face it was enough to bewilder them. And there are some of you in whom such a change of character has been wrought that you could verily say, "I know I am not the man I used to be. My manner of life from my youth is well known to many, if they would testify. But now God, by the gospel of his Son, has opened my eyes, renewed my heart, cleansed my leprosy, and set my feet in the way of peace." Even those who scoff at the gospel are, in the cases of many of us, unable to deny the remarkable and beneficial change it has wrought. There is a rectitude here about which we need be very rigid. Put your foot down and say, "No, you cannot misjudge this. You may philosophize, if you like, but the old-fashioned simple gospel of the children it was that changed me, and made me love that which before I hated, and hate that which before I loved. That is a thing you cannot gainsay. One thing I know."

And it is well, like this man, *to have the facts ready to adduce*. "A man named Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and sent me to the pool to wash, and I washed, and I came seeing." Let them have the plan of salvation, as you first perceived it, very succinctly and plainly put before them. It is often the very best answer you can give to those who question in order to carp and discuss with a view to disparage. Let them have it with the trill you had it at the time. As the Lord has dealt with your soul so tell them what he has done for you. He

must be a hard-hearted man who can sneer at the simple statement of your own conversion. The change it has wrought in you will be a fact which he cannot meet. Though he should think you deluded and call you an enthusiast, there is nothing so difficult for him to grapple with as your candour and confidence. "He opened my eyes." There is the point. "He opened my eyes; and if he opened my eyes, then he was of God. God must have been in such a matter as that, for I was born blind." Give a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear, to all those who oppose you.

Christian men should at all times, also, be as this man was—*quite ready to bear abuse*. "Thou wast altogether born in sin." I do not suppose the blind man cared one atom what they had to assert or to insinuate on that score. Their scorn could not deprive him of his sight. He merely shook his head and said, "I can see; I can see. I was blind, but now I see. Pharisees may abuse me, but I can see. They may tell me I am this, that, and the other, but I can see. My eyes are open." So, child of God, you may often say to yourself, "I may be ridiculed: I may be twitted as Presbyterian, or Methodist; Baptist or Schismatic, or whatever they like; it does not matter. I am saved; I am a changed man. The grace of God has renewed me; let them call me what they like now." Some people are very sensitive of satire, they shrink from and seem chafed at a jest, and what men call "chaff" grates upon them. What a baby a man is who cannot brave a fool's laugh! Stand upright, young man, and when you go back to that drapery establishment show a bold front. You that go to work at some of the big factories, and have been quizzed and bantered because of your religion, screw up your courage and say, "Here I am, five feet ten high, or six feet, or whatever else it may be, and shall I be ashamed to be laughed at for Christ?" Pooh! Well, you are not worth the boots you stand upright in if you are put down by their play. I have no doubt many a soldier in the barrack room finds it hard to keep up his spirits when comrades taunt him with scoff and scorn in their rough way; but after all, dear friends, should not common manliness nerve us with fortitude? When we have got hold of a thing that we believe to be right, we should be greenhorns to let it go for fear of a giddy prank or a paltry grimace. Let them laugh. They will be tired of teasing us when they find out that our temper triumphs over their senseless tricks. Let them find merriment if they can, poor simpletons. I sometimes feel more inclined to smile than to sadden over the jokes that are coined at my expense. Their playful sallies may relieve some of the pitiful sorrows that light unawares on their lonely hours. Melancholy holds carnival in this mad world. Ghosts and goblins haunt the merriest brain. What if for once now and then they get a living object for their sport, and I myself become the butt of their buffoonery—there is no fear that it will harm me; the only danger is that it will hurt them. Be you of that mind, dear friends, and do not care for any of their raillery.

This born-blind man whose eyes were opened was prepared to meet the Pharisees and speak up for himself, because he felt intense gratitude to him who had bestowed on him the priceless boon of sight. You see, all through the narrative, that though he did not know much about

Jesus, he felt conscious that he was his true friend, and he stuck to him through thick and thin. Now, you and I may not know much about our Lord—not one tenth of what we hope to know—but he has opened our eyes; he has forgiven our sins; he has saved our souls; and by his grace we will stick to him, come what may. If your gratitude to him be always at its full heat, I am not afraid but whenever you are taunted, whenever at any time you are put to the test, you will be faithful to your friend and able to say with a sound conscience,—

“I'm not ashamed to own my Lord,
Or to defend his cause;
Maintain the honour of his word,
The glory of his cross.”

III. EVERY SAVED MAN SHOULD WILLINGLY SPEAK FOR HIMSELF ABOUT CHRIST. I have said that you will be driven to it. I have also bidden you to be prepared for it when you are driven to it; but now I have to urge that *you ought willingly to do it.*

Are we not all debtors to Christ if, indeed, he has saved us? How can we acknowledge that debt if we are ashamed of him? His testimony is—“He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved.” Does the baptism save us? Nay, verily, but he that believes is bound to be baptized that he may thus confess his Lord; for baptism is the answer of a good conscience towards God. It is the disciple's grateful response to his Master's gracious call. You know how it is put—“He that with his heart believeth, and with his mouth maketh confession of him, shall be saved.” I may not lawfully forbear to confess if I inwardly believe. Why should I? If I owe so much to him shall I, can I, think of not confessing him? I am sure if there were a commandment issued that we were not to own our Lord, that we were to tell no man, that we must hide the secret from kinsfolk, friends, and neighbours,—to me it would be most distressing. But now doth he bid us own him and bear our testimony to him. We hail the command, we account it most seemly and fitting, and we cheerfully obey it. Is it not so?

How ought we each willingly to speak up for Christ, because we each one of us know most about what he has done for us. No one here knows all that he has done for me. I think I hear you say, “’Tis true, but then you do not know what he did for us.” No, no; we are over head and ears debtors to him. Oh, what mercy he has shown to some of us. If the world could know our state before conversion it might almost make our hair stand upon end to read the story of our lives. How the grace of God has changed us! O what a change! What a change! Should ravens become doves, and lions become lambs, your sciolists might expound or mystify the phenomenon in a word or two of Greek terminology. But this conversion comes across us every day; and scientific men are silent, while scoffers meet it only to make mouths at it. The change is infinitely greater than when dry bones are raised and clothed with flesh. When stones begin to melt and run into streams, it is nothing in point of marvel to the regeneration we have experienced. We must tell it; we must talk about it. We know more about it than others, and we are bound to be the honest narrators of the wondrous narrative.

The more individual testimonies are borne to Christ the more weight there is in the accumulated force of the great aggregate. If I in the mass bear witness for Christ, in the name of you all, saying, "The Lord hath done great things for *us* whereof we are glad," I hope there is some honour to Christ and some influence to take effect. But if ten, twenty, thirty, fifty were to rise one after the other and say, "The Lord hath done great things for me," and each one were to tell his own tale, how much more conviction would be wrought. I have heard of a lawyer in the United States who attended an experience meeting amongst his neighbours. He was a sceptic, if not a thorough unbeliever, when he entered the place, but he sat with his pencil and took notes of the statements of his neighbours. When he afterwards reviewed the evidence he said to himself, "Now, if I had these twelve or thirteen persons in the witness-box on my side, I should feel quite sure of carrying my case. I live among them. They are not the most learned people I ever met with, but they are very honest, trustworthy people—plain spoken; and though each one has told his tale they all come to the same point, and all bear witness to one fact, that there is such a thing as the grace of God, and that it does change the heart. Well," said he, "I am bound to believe it after all this testimony." And he did believe, and he became a Christian. Of this I am certain, that if Christian people were more often to bear their testimony to the power of Jesus Christ in their hearts, the cumulated witness would tell on many a thoughtless mind, and multitudes would come to believe in Jesus. The Holy Spirit delights to own and bless such true stories as you can tell.

Do I hear one and another of you say, "They can do without my story"? Nay, my friend, I would answer, we cannot dispense with your evidence, because the diversities of their experience are as numerous as the individuals converted, although there is unity in the operation of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord opened the eyes of many blind men, he unstopped the ears of many deaf people, he loosed the tongues of many that were dumb, and we cannot count how many lepers he cleansed; but each patient could tell you his own symptoms and the minute particulars of his own healing. Your story, too, has its special interest while it contributes to the general narrative. At least, you would be sorry if it were not so. "The Lord shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there." I know you would like your name to be mentioned then; and I think it would be worth your while now to mention the mercies you have received in just the manner you received them. To speak for myself, I believe that God in converting me manifested a way of his own that exactly suited my need. My case was so like yours as to produce sympathy, and so unlike as to provoke special gratitude, and thus it was doubtless with each one of you. Your career, your character, your circumstances differed in each instance. As a great master seldom paints the same picture twice, so the Master-artist, God, seldom, I think never, works precisely the same in any two hearts. There is a difference, and in that difference there is an illustration of the manifold wisdom of God; therefore, we want your story.

Besides, your testimony may touch the heart of somebody like yourself. Little Mary over yonder says, "Well, I am nobody; only a nurse-

maid. The Lord Jesus Christ has cleansed me and made me his, 'tis true, but you can do without my tale." No, Mary, we cannot. Perhaps your testimony will exactly suit another little lass like yourself. A little maid waited on Naaman's wife. Who but she could have told her mistress that there was healing for Naaman or that he could go to a prophet in Israel and be made whole? Tell your story gently and quietly and at proper times, but let it be known. "Oh," says the old man, "but I am so feeble now. You could dispense with my saying anything." No, father William, we cannot. You are just the man whose few words have full weight. You meet every now and then with choice opportunities of leading souls to the Saviour. "I am too old to think about these things," says one; but you might tell how the Lord has dealt with you in your old age, and may be it will strike home. Why, you working men, if you were all to speak up for Christ, as I know many of you do, what an effect would be produced: what an influence you would have on others like you. Of course when they hear us preach they say, "Oh well, you know, he is a parson. He says it professionally. It is his business to say it." But when you tell of what the Lord has done for you, it becomes the talk: it is repeated over and over again. I know what Tom says when he gets home. He says to his wife Mary, "What do you think of that Jack that I have been working with? Why, he has been talking to me about his soul, and he says his sin is forgiven him, and he seems such a happy man. You know that he used to drink and swear the same as I do, but oh, he is a wonderfully different man now; and I should say, from what I see, there must be something in it. Well, he asked me home the other night, and his place is so different from ours." "There, you hold your tongue," Mary will answer up pretty sharply: "if you brought your wages home to me regularly every week, I could lay them out for you better." "Ah," says he, "and that is what I have been thinking. It is just because he is a religious man that he does bring his wages home, and I think there is something real about his conversion, do you know. He does not drink as I do. He does not mix up with all manner of larks and follies. I should not have thought so much of it had the parson spoke to me. But now I really do think there is something good and genuine in the *grace* he talks about. You and I had better go next Sunday evening to the Tabernacle, or somewhere else, and hear about it for ourselves." Ah, there are many, many souls brought to Christ in that way. We cannot do without your testimony then, Jack, because your conversation is suitable to your own class. And you, your ladyship, you say, "I love the Lord, but I do not think I possibly could say anything in my circle and walk of life." Could not you? Ah, but I am sure you will easily surmount this little difficulty if you attain a little more growth in grace. We had one among us whose rank entitled her to move in an upper sphere of "society," but her choice enabled her to prefer the humble companionship of the church. Her silvery locks some of you well remember. She has left us now. She has gone home to glory. Amongst the aristocracy her lot was cast. Yet with gentle, quiet, bland simplicity she introduced the gospel wherever she went. Many and many have come to these pews to listen to your minister who had never been here but for her calm, beautiful, unobtrusive, holy life,

and the nerve with which, anywhere at any time, she could say, "Yes, I am a Christian; what is more, I am a Nonconformist; and what you will think worse, I am a Baptist; and what you will think worst of all, I am a member of the Tabernacle." She never blushed to own our blest Redeemer's name, nor yet to acknowledge and befriend the lowliest of his disciples. Her faith ye do well to follow. In whatever circle we move let us strive to become centres of influence.

Thus have I tried to show you, dear friends, that each one has a witness to bear—a privilege to be prized no less than a duty to be discharged—because a gift you have received qualifies you for a service you are asked to render. Suppose that the soldier when he marched to battle were to say, "I need not load my gun; I need not fire in the day of battle, seeing that on the right and on the left there are good marksmen picking off the enemy." Yes, but when you are in full musketry-fire your bullet has got its billet and the billet for your bullet is not the billet for any other bullet, therefore let it go, let it go. We must all fire, brethren; not some, but all must fire, and our charge must be this, "One thing I know, whereas I was blind now I see. Therefore do I bear witness to my Lord. Let who will gainsay it, he has opened my eyes."

IV. Lastly, AS EVERY CHRISTIAN, BEING OF AGE, HAS TO SPEAK FOR HIMSELF, WE MEAN TO DO IT; WE MEAN TO DO IT. For my own part, I mean to do so. That which I believe to be true I have spoken to you from my youth up. I have offended a good many at times. I shall offend a good many more, I hope, because that is not a matter I have ever taken into consideration. Is this true? Is it a necessary truth? Is it essential that it be spoken plainly and published widely? Away it goes like a hand-grenade flung into the midst of the crowd. May every minister of Christ—and I trust the rightness of the thing will be more and more recognized—take courage to speak for his Master; speak out, never with bated breath, but in the name of him that sent him, in the name of God, with a courage that befits his commission. A trembling lip and a coward countenance in a minister show him to be unworthy of the office which he pretends to sustain. We must set our faces like a flint and bear testimony to the truth—to the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, as far as God shall teach it to us.

And will not you, my fellow-members, and you Christian people here of all sorts, will not you also take up this resolution—"We are of age, and we mean to speak for ourselves"? You cannot all preach. I hope you will not all try. What a world of tumult and disorder we should have if every man and woman felt a call to preach. We should have a church all mouth, and then there would be a vacuum somewhere. There would be no hearers left if everybody turned preacher. No, it is not to seek precedence in public assemblies, but to exert influence in private society that you are called; by a good conversation, with a speech seasoned with salt, at home among friends, kinsfolk, or companions, to the dozen or to one, make known what love has done, what grace has done, what Christ has done. Make it known; make it known. Among your servants, among your children, among your tradespeople—wherever you go make it known; make it known. Wear your regimentals wherever you go. I do not like to see a Christian

soldier ashamed to show the scarlet. Oh, no, put it on. It is an honour to serve his Majesty. If there is anything in Christianity that you are ashamed of, get out of it. Do not pretend to believe if you are afraid of betraying your profession: but if you do receive the gospel, and believe it, as the revelation of God, never blush to own it, but be brave to avow it at all times and in all places.

"Well," says one, "I am so retiring." I know you are, brother. Come, then, drop a little of your modesty and distinguish yourself a little more for your manliness. Have I not sometimes told you of the soldier who was retiring in the day of battle; but they shot him for a coward. It will not do to be retiring when duty shall urge, or where danger shall summon you to the front. I have heard of a man with the face of a lion and the heart of a deer. Beware of a too retiring disposition. Disreputable things are sometimes disguised in words polite; so diffidence may be dastardly, and caution may be cowardly. Be thou valiant for thy Lord and Master; play not the traitor's part by thy silence as thou wouldst scorn to do it by thy speech—

"Ashamed of Jesus! that dear Friend,
On whom my hopes of heaven depend!
No; when I blush, be this my shame,
That I no more revere his name."

Break the ice then now, and speak to somebody about this blessed message before you go to rest. Will you resolve to do so? Take care that you defer not till your heart grows cool, and the words you purpose freeze on your lips. Nay, but do it, and the thing will grow upon you. Presently you will greet the opportunity as much as you now shrink from the necessity. It will bless your life. I think it is Horatius Bonar who says—

"He liveth long who liveth well!
All else is being flung away;
He liveth longest who can tell
Of true things truly done each day.

"Be what thou seemest; live thy creed;
Hold up to earth the torch divine;
Be what thou prayest to be made;
Let the great Master's steps be thine.

"Fill up each hour with what will last;
Buy up the moments as they go;
The life above, when this is past,
Is the ripe fruit of life below.

"Waste not thy being; back to him
Who freely gave it, freely give;
Else is that being but a dream,
'Tis but to *be* and not to *live*."

Dear friends, some of you who are believers in Christ have never yet confessed him. I hope that you will resolve from this night to avow yourselves his disciples and become his faithful followers. You are of age. "Yes," says one, "I am of rather full age; for I am over fifty." Others of you are older than that, and though you are

believers in Christ you have never confessed him. It will not do, brother it will not do. It will not do to die with ; it does not do to think of now. When he cometh, happy shall they be that were not ashamed of him ; but when he cometh in his glory with all his holy angels, trembling shall take hold on those that thought and said they loved him, but never dared to bear reproach for his name's sake or to suffer shame for the gospel. I hope these reflections will make you very uneasy, and constrain you to say, "Please God, I will join a Christian church before this week is over." If you are a believer in Christ I charge you not to trifle with the voice of conscience, but to pay your vows to the Most High.

Alas ! Alas ! There are some that cannot speak for Christ in any way whatever, because they do not know him. He never opened your eyes. Never try to talk of matters you do not understand, nor pretend to bear witness to mercies you have not experienced. Remember the Christ we preach is not only the Christ of history who was crucified dead and buried, but he is a living Christ at this moment, among us still by his Spirit—changing our natures, turning and guiding the current of our thoughts and our lives, purifying our wishes and motives, teaching us to love each other, admonishing us to be pure, entreating us to be gentle, giving us a heart to aspire after those things that are above instead of grovelling among those things that are below. Now, if you have never met this Christ you cannot bear witness as to his power. But he is to be found. Trust in him. He is divine—the Son of God. His blood is the blood of the great sacrifice, whereof Moses spoke and of which all the prophets bare witness. He is the last great sacrifice of God. Come and trust him. And when you trust him, that trust shall be like the woman's touching of the hem of his garment. No sooner had she touched him than she was made whole, for virtue went out of him. That virtue goeth out of his sacred person still whenever the simple touch of faith brings the sinner into contact with the Saviour. The Lord lead you to believe in Jesus, and when you have believed through grace, come forward and confess his name. So shall you be numbered with his saints now and in glory everlasting.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John ix.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—397, 674, 670.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE DAY OF SALVATION.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JANUARY 13TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Behold, now is the day of salvation.”—2 Corinthians vi. 2.

THE outward features of a day none can change. The kings of the earth cannot command for themselves bright days nor inflict upon their enemies days of tempest. It belongs to a higher than they to command the morning and cause the day-star to know his place. It is little they can do in reference to the light and the sun, and the clouds, and the rain; they cannot bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades nor loose the bands of Orion. Still rulers and governors and kings have accomplished much in shaping the social character of the days of their subjects. Sometimes, like the king of Nineveh, they have proclaimed days of fasting, and their subjects have been clothed in sackcloth; and on other occasions they have exercised the prerogative to ordain days of feasting, as Ahasuerus did at the palace of Shushan, when for a hundred and fourscore days “he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty,” by filling the capital with feasting. Kings of the older stamp were more able to affect the days of their people than they are now; in former times, when men had less wit and more faith in the fable of divine right than they have now, a despot could cause a thick darkness over all the land, even darkness that might be felt. They made war according to their own fancy or frenzy, and what is that but moral midnight? What does war mean but crime, suffering, death, poverty? Is it not usually the sum of all villainies? Everything that is evil either marches with it or follows in its train. The very thought of war for our beloved country darkens our heavens. Alas, with what a light heart have despots drawn the sword and sought to wade through slaughter to imaginary glory, shutting the gates of mercy on mankind that they might seize a province or avenge a jest. Kings can also brighten men's days when they have a mind to be quiet: they make peace and then the nations bask in the sun, and earth covers her battle-fields with verdure. Peace gives the poor world

respite to bind up her gaping wounds and remedy a little of the mischief of the bloody fight. Hard labour and stern self-denial are not grudged by the suffering peasants if they may but have breathing time, and the land may enjoy her Sabbaths; but why should such toil and suffering have been demanded? Simply because kings quarrel, and their subjects must die to end the strife. Princes have also on occasion exercised their prerogative by proclaiming days of amnesty and oblivion: a long rebellion has been crushed out, and there has been no fear of its return, and then the monarch has thought it best to refrain from undue severity, and overlook the evil which he has subdued; accordingly he proclaims that the past shall be blotted out if by a certain time rebellious ones will surrender, yield up their arms, and promise loyalty. Such days are calm and clear, and bring light to despairing rebels who saw no end but the gallows tree. Thus, for humiliation or rejoicing, for war, for peace, or for pardon, monarchs can set their seal upon a day, and mark it with their signature in history. If earthly monarchs can somewhat affect the days of men; what then can be done by the King of kings? The Creator of day and night can surely order all our lights and shades. The Ancient of days is he who can give us "mornings without clouds" or make the day dark with gloom. How often has he made the sun of prosperity to gladden us, and how suddenly has he shrouded us beneath the thick clouds of adversity! Our days are in his hand; and he is Lord of all. You and I, looking back, may well bow before the power and majesty of the Eternal, who hath such infinite power over us that none of us can stay his hand nor say unto him, "What doest thou?"

The Lord has had his days of vengeance; are they not written in the book of the wars of the Lord? How terrible was the hour when he opened the sluices of the firmament that the rain might descend in torrents, and bade the fountains of the great deep rise to meet the descending floods. How dreadful were the forty days wherein the floods above the firmament, in tumultuous mirth, leaped downward to embrace their brethren of the ocean, till the whole earth was covered with one all-devouring deluge, and sea monsters whelped and stabled in the palaces of kings. That was the assize of justice, and the day of vengeance of our God. Such days have been at other times, as, for instance, when he poured hell out of heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrha; when he overthrew Pharaoh and all his host in the midst of the Red Sea; and when his sword stayed not from blood till Hivite and Perizzite and all the Canaanites fell before the hand of Joshua because the iniquity of the people was full, and the hour of execution had arrived. Those were the "dies iræ," and there is another far more terrible yet to come, when heaven and earth shall flee away before the face of him that shall sit upon the great white throne. Blessed be God, we are not at this time living under the rod of vengeance, but our text tells us that "now is the day of salvation." When it is a day of vengeance the Lord does his strange but necessary work thoroughly; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." The prophet said of him, "The Lord revengeth, and is furious." Well did Miriam sing, "The Lord is a man of war, Jehovah is his name": but when he putteth on the silken robes of mercy, and proclaims with silver trumpet

the day of salvation, "blessed are the people that know the joyful sound." I trust that we are among that happy company, and have heard with the inner ear the note of grace. At any rate the Lord hath set a period of salvation, even from the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus to this present hour. The day of salvation has not been suspended, it lasts on, and it shall last till the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout: then shall come the judgment, and strict justice shall sit upon the throne.

The apostle when he was writing this very wonderful sentence dreaded lest men should not avail themselves of its great truth. Read the first verse of the chapter,—“We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.” The day of salvation is a great favour from God, and it would be a fearful thing if we should live in it and miss its privilege. Dear hearers, it is only of divine favour that we enjoy this day of amnesty, oblivion, and forgiveness; and, therefore, we beseech you not to let its golden hours pass over you in vain. This is the great anxiety of my heart at this time in addressing you; I have great fear lest some of you should live in the day of salvation and yet die without being saved, should live in the midst of light with blinded eyes, should dwell with deaf ears, where the silver trumpet soundeth and so the kingdom of God should come very nigh unto you and yet you should not enter it. It will be sad indeed if you should see strangers from afar brought into the kingdom of heaven, and yourselves, who live on its borders, should be utterly thrust out. May the Holy Spirit bless the words which shall now be spoken, so that the evil which we fear may not come upon you, but that you may receive this grace or favour of God to your eternal good.

That you may not receive this grace in vain I shall try, first, to show *the grand reason for this day of salvation*; secondly, I shall speak of *the glorious day itself*; and thirdly, for a minute or two I shall dwell upon *the dark shade which may close that day*, if the Spirit do not lead us into salvation.

I. First, then, THE GRAND REASON FOR THIS DAY—“Now is the day of salvation.” Will you kindly read the context in order to understand why there is a present day of salvation? I will take you a little away from the text to the 20th verse of the preceding chapter, and ask you to bear in mind that the division into chapters is purely arbitrary, and we need take no notice of it whatever. The apostle says, “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” Here then is the secret of the whole matter. This day is the day of salvation because “he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” There could have been no day of salvation if a Saviour had not appeared, and if that Saviour had not become our substitute and surety, salvation would have been denied us by the stern voice of justice. But now Christ hath come into the world and died for sin, and because he hath finished all the works which he undertook, the Lord our God proclaims for us the day of salvation.

Notice that according to the context *this is the day of salvation*, because *we may now be reconciled to God*. "We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." The Lord would not set his ministers to pray men to be reconciled to him if peace were out of the question. He would not send us upon an impossible errand. God is already reconciled to every sinner who has an interest in the blood of Jesus. Towards those the Lord is full of peace. Nothing is wanted now to reconcile God to the believing man. The great thing that is required is to bring men to believe in Jesus Christ that they may be reconciled to God. The feud between you and God, poor prodigal child, need not be continued. You quarrelled with your Father, and you went into the far country; and now you have spent your substance, but your Father sends to you this message, "Be reconciled. Come home, a loving reception awaits you; return at once." Because Jesus hath died the partition wall is broken down; the great gulf between a holy God and unholy man is bridged by the atoning blood. Ye may be reconciled; there is no reason why the terrible quarrel should continue, and therefore, because reconciliation is possible, it is a day of salvation. As long as man remains an enemy to God he cannot of course be saved, for enmity to God is the very essence of his ruin and the sting of his condemnation. While a man lives in enmity to God he is, and he must be, under the power of an evil spirit which curses him; and therefore reconciliation to God is absolutely necessary to the enjoyment of salvation. I repeat that, because reconciliation is possible, this day of salvation has come.

Next, lest any one should exclaim, "But how is it and why is it that so great a boon is conferred? I cannot understand it and therefore I am plunged in doubt"—the plain statement of the 21st verse explains it all: "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." Here is the grand doctrine of *substitution*. Oh soul, if thou believest in Christ Jesus thou shalt be saved because he stood in thy stead, he took thy sin, and the Lord made him to be sin on thine account, and exacted at his hand satisfaction for thine iniquity. He bruised him and put him to grief, so that he was made a curse for us and bore in our stead the wrath of heaven. Now therefore the righteous God will not, cannot, need to vindicate his law a second time. If he has made the Lord Jesus to be sin for us, then he need not visit us for sin nor punish the same offence a second time. Nay, it would be injustice to lay sin once upon the substitute and afterwards upon the sinner; therefore well may there be a day of salvation proclaimed since Christ has finished transgression and made an end of sin.

To help us to understand mercy's great expedient still better, the Holy Spirit tells us that the divine design in Christ Jesus is to make us the "righteousness of God" in Christ. Wonderful expression! I shall not attempt to enter into its fulness, but I will content myself with saying that the two expressions of the verse set forth the imputation of sin to Christ and of righteousness to us, the substitution of Christ in our place, and the standing of our souls in Christ's place, in terms so forcible that he must be determined not to believe the doctrine who does not see it in the words before us. Our Lord is not merely made a sin-offering, but he is made sin, and we are not merely made righteous in Christ, but we are made righteousness itself, ay, and the

righteousness of God, too, which is the very highest conceivable righteousness. I never wish to strain expressions, nor push them one inch beyond their proper meaning, but I think it difficult to do so here, since the language is so very forcible and explicit. If the doctrine which I have explained were intended to be taught, I do not see how it could be more clearly stated. Now, soul, if thou desirest salvation, see how God can give it thee. As he takes thy sin and lays it upon Christ so he takes Christ's righteousness and lays it upon thee. He looks at thee as if thou wert as righteous as his Son who represents thee. He treats thee as if thou hadst been obedient to all his law; he looks upon the model man Christ Jesus, the perfect humanity, and he sees in Christ all his people, and treats them accordingly. He looks upon his people as if they themselves had magnified the law and made it honourable by a sinless life. Wondrous doctrine this, but he that believes it shall find rest unto his soul; and it is because of it that we are authorized to come forth this day and declare the day of salvation. The guilt of the believing sinner is put away, for Christ has carried it; and now righteousness belongs to the sinner, for God imputes it to him without works: therefore this is the day of salvation.

Still keeping to the context, and illustrating in another way the grand reason for the day of salvation, will you kindly read the verse itself which contains our text? "For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." It is a quotation: Paul says, "he saith." Where does God say that? We have no difficulty in discovering: it is in the 49th of Isaiah, which passage should be carefully read by you and heartily pondered. I wish to call your special attention to it as opening up the glorious reason for the famous proclamation of which we are preaching. That chapter, from the sixth to the twelfth verse eminently applies to the Messiah, that is, to our Lord Jesus Christ. Of whom else could the prophet have spoken as in the seventh verse: "Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers"? Who is this but our Lord as he stood before Herod and Pilate? To this very day he is abhorred of the Jews: they mention him ordinarily by the name of "the Crucified," and to them that term is the embodiment of the utmost scorn. We glory in that word, but to them it is the essence of contempt. "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." We are sure that Isaiah spake concerning him, the Crucified, whom we adore, and our next enquiry is, what did he say of him? Read the fifth and sixth verses: "And now, saith the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength. And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." Beloved, are you not glad to hear these words. If you are not curious to hear *me*, but eager to hear my Master's truth, your heart will be rejoiced at this blessed news, that now *Christ has*

come to be the salvation of the Gentiles. We were out in the cold, we were the younger branch of the family, and the heir despised us, we had not yet come into our portion, we were left in darkness and in sin ; but now our turn has come, and we are favoured. From the day when Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" our privileges began. From the day when Paul said, "Seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles," ours has been a day of favour, and the portion which once belonged alone to the seed of Abraham we have obtained, only that we have obtained it to a far larger extent, and we see more clearly its deep spiritual meaning and wealth of blessing. What was veiled under types and shadows is evidently set forth before our eyes. Beloved, tell it all over the world to-day, that salvation has come to the Gentiles, and especially to the dwellers in the islands. How remarkable it is that islands are so often alluded to in the Scriptures, and that they receive the gospel so much more readily than any other parts of the world. As for the ends of the earth, surely we are intended by that term, for our forefathers dwelt where Phoenicians made distant and dangerous journey to find tin and other metals, and our land was thought to be upon creation's verge, inhabited by a barbarous people of uncouth tongue ; and yet to us, even to us, hath the gospel come, and now—

"The British islands are the Lord's,
Here Abraham's God is known ;
While powers and princes, shields and swords,
Submit before his throne."

Jehovah, the God of the whole earth is our God at this day ; in this let us exult, for it proves that to the Gentiles the day of salvation has come.

Further, he goes on to say in the eighth verse, "Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard thee." Mark this well. *God saves us because he heard the Lord Jesus.* There is the secret of all the answers of grace to the prayers of penitents. He saith, "I have heard *thee* in an accepted time : behold, now is the day of salvation." In the lonely watches of the night our great Intercessor prayed for his own. He lived a life of supplication, and he prayed not in vain, for he once said to the Father, "I know that thou hearest me always," and indeed it was always so. His prayers may be said to have reached their highest point when he offered the marvellous intercession recorded in John 17th, and followed it up by his strong crying and tears in the garden when he poured out his soul in agony, while prostrate among the olives he sweat as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground. Mysterious was that bloody sweat ! Oh ye precious drops, ye fell not by chance ; what wrote ye on the soil of Gethsemane in crimson hieroglyphs ? Ye wrote upon the earth the reversal of the curse which fell upon the ground, and the ending of the day of wrath in the day of salvation. That sacred sweat bedewed a garden which henceforth yields the oil of joy, wherewith believers may anoint their faces with gladness. Jesus was heard in that he feared, and henceforth to the chief of sinners it is a gospel of good cheer. "In an acceptable time have I heard thee." Is it not wonderful that Jesus in the garden made

intercession for transgressors who as yet had not learned to pray for themselves? I trust that among those who hear me there are persons unconverted as yet who nevertheless are special objects of the Redeemer's intercession, and who shall find salvation because their great Substitute was heard on their account. We were all heard when our Great High-priest was heard; the Father's answer to him was an answer of peace to all his people.

It is added, "In a day of salvation have I helped thee." Help came to the man Christ Jesus in his hour of agony; the Father succoured him, and there appeared unto him an angel strengthening him. How must that angel have marvelled as he saw the face of the incarnate God red with a sweat of blood. The whole scene is beyond conception strange and singular: the prostrate Saviour in agonizing pangs utters strong cryings, and is helped of his God.

"His earnest prayer, his deepening groans,
Were heard before angelic thrones;
Amazement wrapt the sky:
'Go, strengthen Christ!' the Father said:
The astonish'd seraph bow'd his head,
And left the realms on high."

The angel came to strengthen our champion, not to join in the fight. None could share the conflict, Jesus must tread the wine-press alone; but the angel was empowered to communicate strength to the manhood of Christ, and he did so. Then was it that, being succoured in his hour of need, our Master took the appointed cup so full of woe, and drank it to its utmost dregs, and said, "It is finished!" 'Twas then that by one dreadful draught he pledged the justice of God, and gave this day of salvation to the sons of men.

You see, then, that our present day of privilege has come to us through the Lord's hearing and succouring our Daysman and Redeemer; but, beloved, salvation comes to us also, because according to the eighth verse it is written, "I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth." *Jesus is now God's covenant with man*, and that covenant is one of peace and favour. The Lord says to each believing man "Thy sin will I remember no more. A new heart also will I give thee, and a right spirit will I put within thee. Thou shalt be mine. I will sanctify thee and glorify thee with my Son. Behold, in token of my faithfulness I have given my Son to be the seal, the surety, and the sum of my covenant. Behold, I have given him for a covenant to the people, a leader and commander for the people." Brethren, you are not under the covenant of Moses to-day, you are under the covenant of Jesus; you are not under law, but under grace, and because of this to-day is the day of salvation.

I cannot at this time enlarge upon the other blessed verses which make up the 49th of Isaiah; but let me say it is because Christ is now anointed to give liberty to all captives, and say to them, "Go forth"; it is because he brings the darkened ones out of death-shade and says, "show yourselves," that therefore this is a day of salvation. And, furthermore, when we are delivered from bondage and darkness then because Christ is a shepherd, and leads his flock, and makes them

to feed in the ways, and finds pasture for them in high places, and protects them from hunger and thirst, and gives them springs of water to drink of,—it is because of all this that now is the day of salvation.

I will not further enlarge, but only say if I now preach the day of salvation, as I will try to do, with the utmost boldness and fulness, if any of you enquire, “How is it? How is it? Why is grace so free at this day?” I shall tell you that the cause is quite as marvellous as the fact, that the way of salvation is as surprising as salvation itself, and that Jesus Christ the Son of God, who hath done, and is doing it all, is the most wonderful of all. In his eyes I see the stars which can shine away the midnight of despair; in his hands I see the majestic might which can break the fetters of Satanic bondage; and in his face I see the sacred guidance which shall bring the sacramental host of his elect safe home in unbroken ranks, to the land of the tearless eyes.

II. Now, kindly leave Isaiah and turn again to the text. Under the second head we have to speak upon THE GLORIOUS DAY ITSELF, for the day of salvation is rich with blessing.

First, I would commend that day because of *its fourfold excellence*. Read again the verse in which our text stands. Although the words must be regarded as spoken, in the first place, to our Lord, the best expositors say that they are also addressed to his church in him. The word came to him as the Head and Representative of his people, and so to his chosen as one with him. So then, beloved, in this day of salvation our *prayer will be heard*: “I have heard thee in a time accepted.” Dear hearer, if you will sincerely pray in the name of Jesus you will be heard. Are you very guilty? Ask mercy, and you will be heard. “I have heard thee in an accepted time.” Have you condemned yourself? Have you written your own death warrant? Are you bowed down with a sense of guilt? Pray and pray, and pray again! Oh, brother, pray, I beseech thee. If thou be between the jaws of hell, still pray, for now is the day of salvation, and it is a day in which he that asketh receiveth, he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

Secondly, we are further told that this day *help will be given*. What does it say? “In the day of salvation have I succoured thee.” Are you helpless, are you hopeless? This is a day in which God will come to your relief. Do you need strength to break the chains of habit? Do you need power even to repent? Do you need help to feel your helplessness? Do you need everything? “Behold,” he says, “in the day of salvation have I succoured thee.” He will help you; only ask him, only trust him. When there was a great straitness of business in the Manchester district during the American war, and many were out of work and starving, many instances occurred in which persons were found near to death’s door, “clamming” as they called it, or dying of starvation. When they were kindly visited and asked why they did not apply for relief, they answered that they could not ask. British independence, as we call it, and a very noble spirit it is within proper bounds, was strong within them, and many a man said, “I could not bring myself to ask.” I admire that spirit between man and man, but I do not admire it when it touches the matter of the soul, and lies between a poor worthless sinner and the great and ever blessed God. Do not be proud and say, “I cannot bring myself to ask,” for behold your prayer will be answered now

and whatever help you require will be freely given you. Does not that one fact show that we live in the day of salvation?

And then it is added, "Behold, now is the accepted time," so that the third blessing is that *coming sinners will be accepted*. If you will come to God he will not reject you, whoever you may be. However poor your repentance and weak your faith, it is a gracious time and the Lord will freely accept your sincere desires for his Son's sake. Does not this fact encourage you to come? The door of mercy is open and no man can shut it. The Lord Jesus has never yet rejected a coming sinner and he never will, for it is written, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." It is a season of acceptance, not of rejection: come and partake in the blessing.

And then the fourth excellence is that it is *a time of salvation*, of which we will speak at greater length. You need saving; be glad then that it is salvation's own day. All that can be needed to secure the salvation of a sinner has been fully prepared by Christ and is now freely presented in the preaching of the word to every soul that is willing to receive it. Jesus was born to save, he died to save, and lives to save.

Now, let me notice that this ought to be *peculiarly pleasant news to those who are heavily laden with guilt*. I have known the day when, if I had heard such words as those I try to speak, I think I should have leaped at them at once, as a hungry dog doth at a bone. Sinners, this is the day of salvation, not a day of justice. Come and confess your sin: you shall not be accused, condemned, and punished, but freely forgiven. It is a day in which you may mourn to think you have sinned, but need not despair nor indulge a single unbelieving thought, for that would be unsuitable to the time, which is a day of good tidings. From now till the day when you shall pass out of this mortal state it is one long and blessed day of grace. There was a week of creation, and the Lord God performed great wonders of creating power and put not forth his left hand to destroy; so now there is a day of salvation, and all around angels of love are hovering, singing still, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill towards men." God is saving all that come to him by Jesus Christ. Everything proclaims salvation; the air is full of gentle voices; in fact, your very existence, continued by longsuffering, is a message of grace. You being found in a house of prayer this morning has an eye towards your being saved. Your eager attention gives me hope it shall be so. Shall it not be now accomplished by your believing in Jesus? The fountain to wash your guilt away is filled; the "best robe" to cover you is prepared; the finger ring of everlasting love is ready to be put upon your finger, and the shoes of gladness and of peace are waiting you. Oh, poor soul, to-day I have nothing to preach but salvation; salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ. "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel," said our Lord Jesus, and that gospel is salvation, free salvation to the sons of men.

The truth of our text should also be *very encouraging to those who are fighting against inward sin*. I know some who can trust Christ for pardon, but their chief difficulty is how they can be made holy. I greatly delight in seekers in whom this is the main thought; not so much to escape punishment as to avoid future sin. Well, if you are fighting

against evil in the name of Jesus Christ, do not be discouraged, you will master it, because it is the day of salvation, and it is written, "They shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." Do I address a drunkard? Has the intoxicating cup a strange fascination for you, and have you gone back to drinking, after having often loathed yourself for it? You need not be a slave to it any longer, for this is a day of salvation from that sin: by faith in Christ you shall be delivered out of that deadly snare. Or have you been tempted to some other gross iniquity which holds you spellbound? Does a certain vice fix its basilisk eyes upon you and enchant you till you can no longer restrain yourself? Rejoice, then, for this is the day of salvation from sin. Neither saint nor sinner need sit down under the power of any sin, for in Christ Jesus' name we can overcome the power of evil. Do not excuse yourselves by talking of besetments, ye must thrust away all sin; ye must overcome temptation, for if any sin shall totally vanquish you, you will be lost for ever, since it is only to "him that overcometh" that the crown is given. How, then, can you overcome? Why, only by the power of Christ, who bids us this day lay hold upon salvation from sin. Come to him and trust him, and he will destroy the works of the devil within you.

While this is very encouraging to penitents and to those who are fighting with sin it should be equally cheering to *tried believers*. Beloved, are you in deep trouble just now? Is your spirit overwhelmed within you? Be of good cheer, for this is the day of salvation. It is not a time for saints to die in; it is not a day in which the enemy shall triumph over believers; it is for us the day of salvation. Be glad, then, O ye who are assailed by the enemy. Though your foe may put his foot upon your neck, yet he cannot crush your life out, but you may boldly cry, "Rejoice not over me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise again." It is the day in which believers must be saved. Did not Christian, in "Pilgrim's Progress," find it so from the very day in which he left the city of destruction to the time when he passed through the river and said, "I feel the bottom, and it is good"? He had days of conflict, days of weariness, and days of deep distress of mind, but all along he was saved, saved from the lions, and saved from Giant Despair, saved from the flatterer's net, and saved from the last river with its chill floods. We also live in the day of salvation. "Ah," said a Popish bishop once to one of our martyrs, "You are a heretic, and you will be damned." "My lord," said the heroic man, "there I am at a pass with you; I may be burned, but I never shall be damned." "Why so?" said his adversary. The man replied by quoting that passage in the old translation, "There is therefore now no damnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." Who shall condemn those for whom Christ hath died? it is the day of salvation, not of accusation. It is the day of victory, not of defeat, not of captivity, much less a day of destruction to the true people of God. Let us, then, as is most meet, hang out the streamers of joy, and with glad music set our souls in fit trim to keep the feast of salvation.

And do you not think this truth should *encourage all who are at work to win souls for Jesus*? Brethren, if I had my pick of days I should like to go forth and preach the gospel when it was a day of salvation,

would not you? One likes to go down the river with the tide, and if you can have a fair wind as well it is grand sailing: but surely, now, whenever you seek for souls you have wind and tide with you, for it is the day of salvation. God is saving men, it is his daily business, and his crowning glory, and he has set his heart on it; just as I remarked that Ahasuerus ordained a season of feasting and banqueted the people, and there is no doubt that they did feast at a royal rate, so when the infinite Jehovah proclaims a day of salvation the people shall be saved, and there shall be no question about it. Thousands upon thousands of erring ones shall repent and believe, and so shall be saved to the glory of his grace. Do not tell me that London is very wicked, I know it is; but the Lord has much people in this city, and he will redeem them from all iniquity. Our rural population may also be in many places perishing in gross darkness, but "the Lord knoweth them that are his": he has jewels in yonder cottages, and he will make them to be his own. His chosen are hidden away in the dark mines of iniquity, but he will find out his gold and purify it. His everlasting purpose shall not fail, and his infinite pity shall not be stayed. Glory be to his blessed name, he will accomplish all his purposes, for this is a day of salvation, and his people shall be called to him by some means, by any means, by every means. They shall be brought up out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay; and they shall know that the Lord saveth not by might, nor by power, but by his Spirit.

I think I have worked out that point sufficiently. "Now is the day of salvation."

I wonder whether anybody mistakes me. Dear friends, you know we commonly call this year 1878 a year of grace. We are quite right, for it is so. We say *Anno Domini*, the year of our Lord, and so it is; it is Jesus Christ's year. Any time between the first of January and the last of December in which you seek him, he will be found of you. Suppose you try it now. There cannot be a better hour. Here, where many have found him, consecrate that seat on which you sit. Dear brother, may the Holy Spirit help you to do so by now saying, "I would be reconciled to thee, my God, by the great Mediator: I would accept this salvation which thou hast freely set before me." I pray you do so.

III. To some of you I have spoken these many years, getting now into the twenty-fifth year, and shall I speak in vain? Our last word was to be something about A DARK CLOUD WHICH MAY DARKEN THE CLOSE OF THIS DAY OF SALVATION. I pray it may not, yet I fear it. My dread is lest you receive this great favour in vain, lest you live in this day of salvation and yet are lost. That will be for me a calamity, for I shall lose my labour; and more, there will be your mother's tears all lost, your father's prayers all lost, and your Sabbath school teacher's earnest instructions all lost, and other ministers' frequent invitations all gone for nothing. May it not be so, for that is unprofitable for you as well as for us. You will have lost all those Sabbaths, all those Bible readings, all those prickings of conscience. I know some of you are very attentive hearers and yet you have not found grace in this day of salvation. Salvation is all round you, yet you have it not. You have wasted golden opportunities. Ah, there

will come a day when you will wish for another Sabbath but it will be denied you ; your last sermon shall have been heard and your last warning shall have been received. Do not lose, I pray you, the privileges you enjoy of being born in a Christian land, of having an open Bible, of listening to an earnest ministry. Do not let those who never enjoyed such privileges have in the eternal world the start of you. Do not let Sodom and Gomorrah and Tyre and Sidon have to tell you that it is more tolerable for them in hell than for you. The Lord Jesus assures us that it will be so if you have been hearers of the gospel and lived in the day of salvation and received this grace in vain. The text says it is *a day* ; and a day comes to an end. These are no words of mine, but the words of Scripture. "Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, 'To-day if ye will hear his voice.'" Do you not see that the day of salvation, though it has lasted eighteen hundred years and more, is still a day, and will surely end ? The opportunity of mercy lasts not for ever, let none deceive you as to that matter. The hope of grace will end with the day of grace ; let not the smooth-tongued ministers of the devil who enter the pulpits of Christ now-a-days delude you as to any vain hope that another day of grace will come. I have no such flattering message to speak to you, but I speak as this Book teacheth. If you let this day of salvation pass, and if you glide into another world unsaved you are lost for ever. I know no more, but I know that this Bible so declareth it. "These shall go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal." Do not indulge vain dreams. If the Lord speaks of a day, be sure that he hath limited the day ; and if he declares this to be the day of salvation, you are not authorized to expect that another such period will ever come. "If he that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses" (listen to that) : "of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God." Oh, yield to the Lord Jesus, accept his salvation, and trust him at once. I pray you in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah xlix.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—241, 239, 406.

MR. SPURGEON, having been obliged to leave home through ill health, entreats the prayers of his readers for his restoration. The sermons will continue to be published every week, and it would greatly cheer the preacher to see their circulation increased, which would soon be accomplished if those who profit by them would kindly introduce them to their friends.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

FAMILY REFORMATION; OR, JACOB'S SECOND VISIT
TO BETHEL.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there."—Genesis xxxv. 1.

THERE are critical times in most families: times when much decision of character will be needed on the part of the father to guide things aright. They say there is a skeleton in every house, and, if so, I would add that occasionally the unquiet spirit takes to troubling the household, and needs to be laid. There are times when the evil in the hearts of the children and in the nature of the parents becomes specially energetic, and brings about difficulties and perplexities, so that if a wrong turn were taken, the most fearful mischief would ensue; and yet, if there be grace in the hearts of some or all of the family, a strong and gracious hand at the helm of the ship may steer it right gallantly through the broken water, and bring it safely out of its dangers to pursue its journey much more happily in the future. Now, such a crisis had come to Jacob's family: things had reached a sad pass, and something must be done; everything seemed out of gear, and matters could not continue any longer as they were. All was out of order, and threatened to become much worse. Even the heathen outside began to smell the ill savour of Jacob's disorganized family, and the one alternative was—*mend or end*.

A stand must be taken by the head of the house. There must be a reform in the household, and a revival of religion throughout the whole family. If you notice, Jacob himself was in a bad way. His business was to remain in Canaan a mere sojourner, dwelling in tents, not one of the people, but moving about among them, testifying that he looked for "a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." He expected to inherit the land, but, for the time being, he was to be a stranger and a sojourner, as his fathers Abraham and Isaac had been. Yet at Succoth we read that he built booths—scarcely houses, I suppose,

but more than tents. It was a compromise, and a compromise is often worse than a direct and overt disobedience of command. He dares not erect a house, but he builds a booth and thus shows his desire for a settled life; and though it is not ours to judge the purchase of land at Shechem, still it looks in the same direction. Jacob is endeavouring to find a resting-place where Abraham and Isaac had none. I will not speak too positively, but the patriarch's acts look as if he desired to find a house for himself, where he might rest and be on familiar terms with the inhabitants of the land. Now the Lord his God would not have it so. The chosen family was intended by the divine purpose to dwell alone and maintain a peculiar walk of separation. The seed of Abraham was ordained to be in the highest sense a Nonconformist tribe, a race of separatists. Their God meant them to be a distinct people, entirely severed from all the nation among whom they dwelt; and so they must be, but the inclination to be like their neighbours was very manifest in Jacob's family.

The spell of Esau's greatness had no doubt affected the clan of Jacob: they had, from the patriarch himself down to the youngest child, made very willing obeisance before "my lord Esau," and the homage paid was not without its effect. That obeisance was an act which from some points of view we cannot condemn, but it was scarcely becoming in one who was a prince with God, and elect of the Most High, and its effect could not have been elevating. The sons seem to have taken very readily to paying homage to profane Esau, though they were not little children, but young men; they bowed before their noble looking uncle with his grand band of warriors, and were, perhaps, fascinated by the charms of so warlike a member of the family, whose sons were dukes and great ones in the land. It added importance to the shepherds to feel that they were related to a great captain. Now that they had come to Shechem, and their father had purchased a piece of land there, and had built booths, they felt themselves to be of some importance, and they must go visiting, for everybody loves society. And now comes the mischief of it. Jacob's only daughter must visit with the prince of the people. The daughter of Israel is invited to the dances and the assemblies of the upper circles of the land. It is winked at by the father, possibly, and the brothers aid and abet it. She is often away at the residence of Shechem, the fine young Hivite prince, a very respectable gentleman indeed, with mansion and estates; but there comes an ill matter of it, not to be mentioned. Then her brothers in their hot anger run into a sin that was quite as evil as Shechem's crime; by way of making some amends for their sister's defilement, with dastardly treachery they slay the whole of the Shechemites, and so bring the guilt of murder upon a family which ought to have been holiness unto the Lord.

Children of God cannot mix with the world without mischief. The world does hurt to us and we to it when once we begin to be of the world and like it. It is an ill-assorted match. Fire and water were never meant to be blended. The seed of the woman must not mix with the seed of the serpent. It was when the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and took of them as they pleased, that the deluge came and swept away the population of the earth. Abundant

evil comes of joining together what God has put asunder. The corpses of the Shechemites and the indignation of all who heard of the foul deed were the direct result of the attempt to blend Israel with Canaan. And now Jacob's household is filled with fear, and the old man himself—a grand man and a believer, but a long way off being perfect—cries out to his sons, in great distress, “Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house.” To this his sons only replied, “Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot?”—taking his rebuke in a rough fashion, and by no means showing any sense of shame. They do not appear to have been the worst of his sons, and yet their rage and cruelty were most terrible; and when they were charged with their crime they justified it. Wretched indeed was the condition of Jacob's household!

That family was badly arranged from the very beginning. Polygamy needed not to be denounced in so many words in Scripture, because the specimens given of it are all so thoroughly bad that no one can doubt that the thing is radically vicious in its mildest form. It worked shockingly in the case of Jacob. His wife Rachel whom he loved so well had, I fear, been the cause of the introduction into the family of idolatry in the form of teraph, or symbol-worship. She had learned it of her father Laban, and secretly practised it; and if Jacob was almost aware of it he did not like to say anything to her, his darling, the queen of his soul. Those bright eyes which had charmed him years ago, how could he dim them with tears? The children of Leah took up their mother's cause, and the sons of the handmaids sided with each other, and this made trouble. The many mothers of the family created difficulties and complications of all sorts, so that the household was hard to arrange and keep in good going order. It was not what a believing household should be, and it is not wonderful that affairs so thoroughly went awry that it appeared as if even the salt was losing its savour, and the good seed was dying before it could be sown in the earth, and made to bring forth fruit. A stand must be made. Something behoves to be done, and Jacob must do it. The Lord comes in, and he speaks with Jacob, and since the good man's heart was sound towards God's statutes, the Lord had only to speak to him and he obeyed. He was pulled up short, and made to look at things, and set his house in order, and he did so with that resolution of character which comes out in Jacob when he is brought into a strait, but which at other times is not perceptible.

We shall take up this incident at this time, and may God grant that we may find practical teaching in it for ourselves and for our families, by the guidance of his gracious Spirit.

Notice, first, God having appeared to Jacob, *what was to be done?* secondly, *what happened in the doing of it?* and thirdly, *what followed thereon.*

I. First, then, WHAT WAS TO BE DONE?

The first thing to do was *to make a decided move*. God said to Jacob, “Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there.” You must hasten away from Shechem, with its fertile plains, and make a mountain journey up to Bethel, and dwell there. You have been long enough near these

Shechemites ; mischief has come from your being so intimate with the world. You must cut a trench between yourselves and the associations you have formed, and you must go up to Bethel and remain there awhile. Every now and then, dear brothers and sisters, we shall find it necessary to say to ourselves and to our family, "We must come out from among worldlings, we must be separate. We are forming connections which are injurious to us, and we must snap the deceitful bonds. We are being led into habits and customs in the management of the household which are not such as God would approve. We are doing this to secure favour of one, and doing that to escape frowns from another, and we are not walking straight with the Lord, and therefore to bring us back to our moorings we must come right out and go to Bethel, to the place where God met with us at the first. We must go to our first trysting-place and meet with our Lord again, cost whatever the journey may : though some may feel it to be a cross, yet we must begin again and work upon the old lines. Back to our old Puritanism and precision we must go and renew our vows. Let us go right away from worldliness and get to the Bethel of separation, and draw near to God again." Have you never found, beloved, when you have been very deep in business and very much in the world that you begin to feel heart-sick, and you cry, "It won't do, I must get out of this ; I must retreat into a holy solitude, and enjoy a little quiet communion with God" ? Have you not felt concerning your family sometimes, "We are not serving the Lord aright, nor becoming more holy or devoted, everything appears to be going down-hill. We must steer the other way. We must alter our present declining state in the name of God, or else we cannot expect to have his blessing." I know that you have come to such a pass, and have resolved to take a decided step. May the Lord help all of us when we see clearly that something is to be done. May we have grace to end sinful hesitation, and set about amendment at all hazards.

Now they must *revive old memories*. "Go up to Bethel, and dwell there : and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother." A revival of old memories is often most useful to us, especially to revive the memory of our conversion. The memory of the love of our espousals, when we went after the Lord into the wilderness, and were quite satisfied to be denied and disowned of all, so long as we might but dwell near to him—that memory is right good for us. It is well to recall that hallowed hour when we, for the first time, set up a family altar, and with our dear ones bowed before the Lord ; then we felt that the separated place was a very sweet one, and we were most glad to get right away from the world and to live with Christ, and in Christ, and for Christ, and like Christ. We cannot help blushing as we remember those early days. We did not think that we should have fallen so far short of our ideal. Let the recollection of Bethel, then, come over us, to make us remember the lovingkindness of the Lord, and mourn over our own spiritual declensions. Are you singing,

"What peaceful hours I once enjoyed,
How sweet their memory still,
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill " ?

Then you must come back to your first hours of communion. Where you lost your joy you will find it, for it remains where you left it. If you have neglected the prayer-closet, if you have ceased from the searching of the word of God, if you have departed from a close walking with Christ, and if you and your families have fallen into a very low state, so that strangers who look in would hardly know whether yours is a godly house or not—if it is so, then go back mourning and sighing to Bethel, and pray that the old feelings may be revived in you. God grant they may. And may you in addition be led to cry, How could I have so much departed from the living God? How could I have played the fool and gadded about so much when I might have rested still in peace if I had lived near to God. This, then, was the work which was to be done by Jacob, first, to make a decided move, and secondly, to revive old memories: have you any call to the like course of action? If so, see ye to it.

But now, again, Jacob must *keep an old vow*. I do not quite remember how many years old that vow was, but I suppose some thirty or so; yet he had not kept it. He was much younger when he knelt and said, "If thou wilt be with me," and so on, "then this place shall be God's house;" and he has forgotten that vow, or at least he has not fulfilled it all these years. Be very slow to make vows, brethren—very slow. They should be but very seldom presented, because all that you can do for God you are bound to do as it is; and a vow is often a superfluity of superstition. But if the vow be made, let it not wait beyond its time, and complain of thee to thy God. An old and forgotten vow will rot and breed most solemn discomfort to thy heart; at first it will gnaw at thy conscience, and if thy conscience at last grows hardened to it others of thy powers will suffer the same petrifying process. Moreover, a vow forgotten will bring chastisement on thee, and perhaps the rod will fall upon thy family. The connection between Jacob's not going to Bethel and the mischief that happened to his daughter Dinah, and the sinning of his sons Levi and Simeon, may not be distinctly traceable, but I feel persuaded that there was such a connection,—the sin of omission in the father led on to sins of commission in the sons. With the sins of his children the Lord chastened Jacob for his breach of promise. Note that the Lord does not remind Jacob of his wrong, nor chide him for it, but he puts him in a position in which he will remind himself of it. It is so gentle—I was going to say so courteous, of our God; he is so gentle, so tender, that he would rather his servant should recollect the vow than be distinctly told of it in so many words. See, then, Jacob is bound to go and do according to his solemn pledge. Now, dear friend, it may be that part of the business you and I have to do in order to set our families right, is to recollect something we said we would do years ago, but which we have not done. We have had the ability for a long while, but the willingness has not been with us; let us now bestir ourselves and clear our consciences in the matter. God alone knows of it: let not this secret thing lie festering in our hearts and grieving the Holy Ghost. I speak, I believe, very closely home to some of my hearers. Perhaps the message is sufficiently distinct, and I had better say no more, but let your own hearts recollect your neglected promises.

It appeared to Jacob, next, that if he was to fulfil his vow, it was necessary to *reform his whole house*; for he could not serve the Lord and worship other gods. He said to all that were with him—to his sons first, and then to his hired servants and the rest—“Put away the strange gods that are among you.” Yes, it must come to that. If I am to get back to my old position with God I must break my idols.

“The dearest idol I have known,
Whate’er that idol be;
Help me to tear it from its throne,
And worship only thee.”

The idols of the family: the acts and deeds of the young folk which would grieve God, the doings of the elder ones which are inconsistent with a profession of faith in Jesus, the ill tempers that have been indulged, the divisions of heart which have come up in the family, with all that is sinful and unlovely, must go, if we are to get right again. There must be a general breaking and burying of idols, or we cannot worship the God of Bethel.

And then next he said, “Be clean.” There was to be, I suppose, a general washing, indicative of purgation of character by going to God with repentance and seeking forgiveness. Jacob also said, “Change your garments.” This was symbolic of an entire renewal of life, though I fear me they were not all renewed. At any rate this is what was symbolized by “Change your garments.” Alas, it is easier to say this to our families than it is to get them to do it. And do we wonder? Since it is so much easier for ourselves to say than it is for ourselves to do. Yet, beloved, if your walk is to be close with God, if you are to commune with the God of Bethel, you must be cleansed. The Lord cannot commune with us while we wallow in sin. “What concord hath Christ with Belial?” Sin must be put away. The best believer that lives must wash his feet if he is to draw near to God as he has done aforetime. All this Jacob was to undertake, and to him who had become so lax with his family it was no small work to screw up his courage and say to Rachel and all of them—“Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments.”

Well, then, the next and last thing which they were to do was to *celebrate special worship*. “Let us arise, and go up to Bethel, and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.” When we get wrong and feel that there must be a decided change, we must set apart special times of devotion. We must say to our soul, “Soul, soul thou hast fed so little lately. This leanness of thine comes of neglecting spiritual feasting. Come, thou must humble thyself; thou must lay thyself low before God, and thou must approach the Lord with lowly reverence, and beg to be refreshed with his presence. Thou must set apart more time for feeding upon Christ, and upon his word, and never be quiet till thou becomest again full of grace and of the Holy Ghost.” In families it is often well, when you see that things are wrong, just to call the household together and say, “We must draw near unto God with peculiar earnestness, for we are going astray. We have not given

up family prayer, but we must now make it special, and with double zeal draw nigh unto God." I am afraid that some of you neglect family prayer. If you do I am sure it will work evil in your households. The practice of family prayer is the castle of Protestantism. It is the grand defence against all attacks by a priestly caste, who set up their temples and tell us to pray there, and pray by their mediation. Nay, but our houses are temples, and every man is a priest in his own house. This is a brazen wall of defence against superstition and priestcraft. Family prayer is the nutriment of family piety, and woe to those who allow it to cease. I read the other day of parents who said they could not have family prayer, and one asked this question: "If you knew that your children would be sick through the neglect of family prayer, would you not have it? If one child was smitten down with fever each morning that you neglected prayer, how then?" Oh, then they would have it. "And if there was a law that you should be fined five shillings if you did not meet for prayer, would you find time for it?" Yes. "And if there were five pounds given to all who had family prayer, would you not by some means arrange to have it?" Yes. And so the enquirer went on with many questions, and wound up with this: "Then it is but an idle excuse when you, who profess to be servants of God, say that you have no time or opportunity for family prayer?" Should idle excuses rob God of his worship and our families of a blessing? Begin to pray in your families, and especially if things have gone wrong get them right by drawing near to God more distinctly. Did I hear you say, "We do not want to be formalists." No, I am not afraid you would be. I am afraid of your neglecting anything that tends towards the good of your household and your own spiritual growth, and therefore I pray you labour at once to acquaint yourselves with God and be at peace. Draw near the Lord again, more thoroughly than you have done before, for it is the only way by which the backslidings of persons and families are at all likely to be corrected. God grant a blessing with these words by the power of the Holy Ghost.

II. And now I come to my second point—WHAT HAPPENED IN THE DOING OF IT?

Well, several things happened, and one or two of those were rather surprising. The first was that *all heartily entered into the reforming work*. I am sure they did, because the fourth verse says, "They gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hands"—all of them—"and all their earrings which were in their ears." He had not said anything about their earrings. Was there any hurt in their earrings? For a woman to wear an earring is not such a dreadful thing, is it? Perhaps not, but I suppose that these earrings were charms, and that they were used in certain incantations, and heathenish customs. It must have been a very sad discovery to Jacob, who himself could not have endured it, to find that wicked superstitions had come into his tents through his winking at the teraphs. The evil had gone on in secret, and though suspected was not actually under Jacob's eye. I dare say he was not quite sure that the teraphs were in the tent, and did not want to be quite sure, because it was Rachel, you know, who had them, and she—well, she was Rachel—and she had been brought up so differently from Jacob himself, that perhaps Jacob thought he

must not press her too severely upon the point. Perhaps he said to himself, "When I talk with her she does not seem at all idolatrous; I believe she is a good woman, and I must recollect her bringings-up, and as she comes from a high-church family I must let her have her little symbols; I do not know indeed that she has a teraph; I have never absolutely seen it;"—but there it was, and it was the nucleus of superstition. She and those around her had become corrupted with the superstitions of the heathen, and these earrings were the indication of their superstitious feeling, if not the instruments of divination.

Now, as soon as Jacob speaks they all give up their idols and their earrings. I like this. It is a blessed thing when a man of God takes a stand, and speaks, and finds that his family are all ready to follow. Perhaps it was the fear that was upon them just then, the fear of the nations round about which made them so obedient. I am not sure it was a work of grace; but still, as far as outward appearance went, there was a willing giving up of all that could have grieved the Lord. And you will sometimes be pleased, Christian friends, when things get wrong and you determine to set them right, to see how others will yield to your determination. You ought to take courage from this. Perhaps the very person of whom you are most afraid will be the most ready to yield, and the most eager to help. You have been afraid of Rachel, but she has such love for you that she will do anything for you, and give up her teraphs at once. The sons who were so rough in speaking to you when you spoke in your own name, and spoke about yourself and said, "You have made me to stink," and so on, will answer very differently when you speak in God's name. There will be such a power going with God's word that they will yield freely and heartily. They did so in Jacob's case. All of them gave up their idols, and they buried them in the earth beneath the oak. Would God a day would come to old England when all the crucifixes and priestly vestments, and the whole ruck of the symbols and emblems of superstition could be buried under some grand old gospel oak, never to be disinterred again. If we do not see this in the nation we will at least secure it in our own houses.

Another circumstance happened, namely, *that protection was afforded him*, immediate and complete. "They journeyed: and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob." In their way cities abounded, and as it were hemmed them in, and the people might have turned out and cut to pieces the little tribe of Israel, but a message had gone forth from the Lord of hosts, saying, "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm"; and so they journeyed in safety. "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him"; and now that Jacob has determined to set things right he walks unharmed. You do not know how much of personal trouble which you are now bearing will vanish as soon as you determine to stand out for God. You do not know how much of family difficulty that now covers you with dread will vanish when you yourself have feared the Lord, and have come forth decidedly and determinedly to do the right. No danger shall befall the man who walks with God, for with such a companion malaria breathes health, and curses become blessings; but ye

know not whither ye are going, and into what thick woods ye plunge, when ye once forsake the Lord, and walk contrary to his mind. The Lord thy God is a jealous God, and if thou dost not respect his jealousy, and walk before him with holy fear, thou shalt be made to feel his wrath. Since he has known you only of all the people of the earth, for that very reason he will chasten you for your iniquities. This plague of evils shall be stayed when you purge out your idols, but not till then.

In the next place *the vow was performed*. They came to Bethel, and I can almost picture the grateful delight of Jacob as he looked upon those great stones among which he had lain him down to sleep, a lonely man. Perhaps he hunted out the stone that had been his pillow; probably it still stood erect as part of the pillar which he had reared in memory of the goodness of God, and the vision he had seen. There were many regrets, many confessions, many thanksgivings at Bethel. "With my staff I came to this place, but now I am become two bands. Look, my sons! look, Rachel! Look, all of you: this is the spot where when I fled from Esau with nothing but my staff and wallet I laid me down, and the Lord appeared to me; and he has kept me all my life long. Come, help me as I put together the unhewn stones to make an altar; and this great stone, behold we will pour oil on the top of it, and we will together sing the praises of El-beth-el—the God of the house of God, the God who is a house for his people, the God who has a household of which we form a part, the God under whose wings we seek refuge." I have no doubt that Jacob and his house spent a very happy time at Bethel, where mourning softened thankfulness, and joy sweetened penitence, where every sacred passion in the patriarch's soul found vent, and poured itself out before the Lord. He thought of the past, rejoiced in the present, and hoped for the future, for now he had come to be with God and to draw near to him.

But what else happened? Why, now *there came a death and a funeral*. Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died. Her name means a bee. And we have had old nurses ourselves, have we not, who have been like busy bees in our household? Dear old Deborah nursed our mother and nursed us, and is still willing to nurse our children. We do not grow that sort of people now, they tell me. I am afraid we do not grow the same kind of masters and mistresses that they used to have in years gone by. I am not sure about it, but I believe that if there were more Rebekahs there would be more Deborahs. Somehow I think we are generally about as well treated as we treat others, and we get measured into our bosoms very much that which we ourselves measure out. There may be exceptions, and there are, but that is the general rule. Well, dear old Deborah had left Laban's house and gone with Miss Rebekah when she went into the far country to be married; and she had taken care of her mistress' two boys, Jacob and Esau, and had set her heart on the same boy that the mother loved so well, and she had sorrowed with Rebekah when he, having grown up, had been compelled to save his life to flee from his father's household. I cannot tell when she came to live with Jacob. Perhaps Rebekah sent her to live with her favourite son because she thought there were so many in the family that somebody was wanted to look after them all—a person old and discreet

to come between Jacob and the perpetual jars of the household. No doubt Jacob often found it pleasant to make the good old soul a confidante in his troubles. And now she dies, and they bury her under the oak, which they call the oak of weeping—Allon-bachuth. Is it not strange that when you are trying to get right there comes a great sorrow? No, it is not strange; for you are trying to purge out the old leaven, and the Lord is going to help you. You are trying to set everything right with him, and he comes and takes away one of the best people in the house who helped you most of all, one of the staunchest old Christian people that you ever knew, whom you wanted to live for ever, and he does it not to hinder but to help you in your labour. He knows best: a touch of the pruning-knife was wanted by the vine of Israel, that it might bring forth more fruit. The good nurse died when they seemed to want her most, but it was better for her to die then than that she should have departed when Dinah's shame and Simeon's crime had made the household dark. It was better that she should live to see them purged from idols and on the road to her old master Isaac, for then she would feel as if she could say, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." The moral of the incident is that the Lord may heat the fire all the more when he sees the refining process going on, and we must receive the further trial as a token of love and not of anger if he smites us heavily when we are honestly endeavouring to seek his face.

III. This is what happened while they were doing it. Now we close with the third head, namely, WHAT FOLLOWED THEREON.

All this putting away of idols and going to Bethel—did anything come of it? Yes. First, *there was a new appearance of God*. Read the ninth verse. "And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padan-aram, and blessed him": this was a new appearance of God. Some of you will not understand what I say, but I leave it to those who know the Lord: there are times when God is very near to us, I wish it were always so; but some of us can mark out epochs in our spiritual history in which we were wonderfully conscious that God drew near to us. We felt his awful presence, and were glad. The Lord seemed to put us in the cleft of the rock, and make his glory pass before us. I have known such times. Would God I knew them oftener! It is worth while to have been purged and cleansed, and to have done anything to be favoured with one of those divine visits in which we almost cry with Paul, "Whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell: God knoweth." A clear view of God in Christ Jesus and a vivid sense of Jesus' love is a sweet reward for broken idols and Bethel reformatations.

The next thing that came of it was *a confirmation to Jacob of his title of prince*, which conferred a dignity on the whole family. For a father to be a prince ennobles all the clan. God now puts upon them another dignity and nobility which they had not known before, for a holy people are a noble people. You that live in God's presence are in the peerage of the skies. "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people." He first makes them princes, and then to crown

it he makes them princes of princes, because if all his people are princes it follows that those who are princes among his people are princes among princes. The Lord has a way of conferring high spiritual dignities upon those who seek to order their households aright, and to keep their hearts clean and chaste before him. Such honour have all the saints who follow the Lord fully. God help us to keep close to Jesus, and enjoy daily communion with him.

And then, next, *there was given to Jacob and his family a vast promise*, which was, in some degree, an enlargement of a promise made to Isaac and to Abraham before. "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins." I do not remember anything said to Abraham about a company of nations, or about kings coming out of his loins, but out of the loins of Israel, a prince, princes may come. God puts upon his promise a certain freshness of vastness and infinity now that Jacob has drawn near to him. Brethren, God will give us no new promise, but he will make the old promises look wondrously new. He will enlarge our vision so that we shall see what we never saw before. Have you ever had a painting which hung neglected in some back room? Did it one day strike you that you would have it framed and brought into a good light? When you saw it properly hung on the wall did you not exclaim, "Dear me! I never noticed that picture before. How wonderfully it has come out"? And many and many a promise in God's word will never be noticed by you till it is set in a new frame of experience. Then, when it is hung up before you, you will be lost in admiration of it. Sin makes the promises to be like old pictures coated over with dirt. There must be a cleansing of ourselves, and then it will be like a careful cleaning of the picture, from which no tint suffers, but all receive a new bloom. God will make his Bible seem a new book to you. You will find joy in every page, and your soul shall dance for joy as you see the great things which God has prepared for you, ay, and for your children also if they are walking in the truth, for "the promise is unto us and to our children, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call." With Jacob by the new appearing of the Lord the inheritance was confirmed, for thus runs the Scripture: "The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land." So, dear friends, all the blessed covenant of grace with all the appurtenances thereof shall be made distinctly and clearly yours when you have gone to Bethel and with holy decision drawn near to the Lord your God.

I will not detain you except to say that you may also expect very *familiar communion*. Notice the thirteenth verse, "God went up from him in the place where he talked with him." *Talked with him!* *Talked with him!* It is such a familiar word. God talking with man. We say "conversing" when we are speaking in a dignified manner; but "talking!" Oh that blessed condescension of God when he speaks to us in the familiar tones of his great love in Christ Jesus. There is a way of converse with God which no tongue can explain: they only know it who have enjoyed it. Brethren, there are fellowships with God to be enjoyed of which a large number of Christians have no idea. He who humbles himself to behold the things that are in heaven and that are in

earth dwells with lowly ones. Idols broken, and garments changed, and altars built, and the soul kept near to God, and then "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant." This is so inestimably precious a boon that I urge you to seek after it, urging myself most of all.

The chapter closes with the death of Rachel, and so, perhaps, when we get nearest to God there may come another trial. The old tradition was that no man could see God's face and live. It was not true, but it contained a truth, for scarcely can a man enter the secret place of thunder and have communion with God without special trial. Yes, it is even so, for "even our God is a consuming fire." He asks the question, "Who shall dwell with the everlasting burnings?" and the answer is, "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart, that shutteth his ears from hearing of blood," and so on, "he shall dwell on high." When we come to dwell with him who is fire, the fire must burn, and we must feel it. That hallowed flame will consume much that our unhallowed flesh would like to keep, and there will not be a burning without our enduring sharp smart and pain. God's furnace is in Zion, and his fire is in Jerusalem. He will purify the sons of Levi as silver is purified. "Who shall abide the day of his coming? for he will be as a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap." Yet if we are in a right state that is exactly what we want. O that our sinfulness were wholly burned up! Trial is welcomed if sin may but be conquered. Even Rachel may die if Jesus lives in us but the more. Lord, give us grace and thy presence, even if we pass through the furnace a thousand times in consequence thereof. Hear us, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—

Genesis xxxv. 1—21, 27—29.

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REASONS FOR TURNING TO THE LORD.*

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, JANUARY 13TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight."—Hosea vi. 1, 2.

If man had never sinned, what delightful intercourse there would have been between him and God! A fairy vision rises before us of loving obedience and condescending fellowship, holy delight and boundless favour, lowly adoration and fatherly smile, perfect bliss and infinite complacency. Alas! alas! it is no more than a vision! God would have treated man with familiarity and indulgence, lavishing favour and honour upon him. The garden of Eden, fair as were its glades, and lovely as were its flowers, was but a faint image of the things prepared for man had he continued in loyalty to God: inconceivable delights would have filled up the days of our life on earth had not the serpent's trail come across our nature, and slimed it o'er with sin. I shall not attempt any picture of man dwelling with God, and God revealing himself to man in new forms; ever increasing man's knowledge, and, at the same time, causing his bliss to overflow. Alas! that dream has never been realized. That dangerous fruit which hung upon the tree of knowledge of good and evil has been plucked and eaten, and we will not pause to rehearse the sad story of the foul iniquities and the countless ills which have therefore come upon mankind and severed man from his God.

Because of the fall, and man's depravity, justice now comes in with its rod and sword and changes the complexion of our life. God deals very graciously with man, but not at all after the fashion in which he might have dealt with him: he cannot now perpetually smile, but is led by his

* Mr. Spurgeon was exceeding unwell and his voice painfully weak, hence the pause in the middle of the sermon, during which the congregation sang part of a hymn to enable the preacher to gain strength enough to resume his discourse. This was the last sermon before Mr. Spurgeon's departure from home to obtain needed rest, and it has been revised by Mr. Spurgeon at Mentone. The sermons are continued regularly every week.

holiness to look on him with wrathful countenance. The loving God, compelled by love itself, frowns at sin. He threatens, he denounces. His justice and holiness lead him to use rough words towards his erring creatures; he does more: in infinite love he chastens as well as rebukes. Instead of fatherly caresses the great Lord wisely takes down the rod and lays it on the backs of those whom he most truly loves. "He scourges every son whom he receiveth." Those nearest to his heart and most approved of his soul among the sons of Adam have nevertheless to feel that "our God is a consuming fire." Placed in the crucible, they are thrust into the white heat of the furnace, and there are they called to suffer that their dross may be removed. If thus the Lord is severe to his own people, what are his dealings with the ungodly? "God is angry with the wicked every day." The wise men of modern thought have made a new God of late—one of those gods newly come up that our fathers knew not, and who is quite unknown to the Bible, as false a god as Apollo or Baal. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob these deep thinkers cannot endure, but if you say that God is angry with the wicked every day, these modern god-makers tell you that he is too loving for that,—that he cannot possibly be angry, but loves all, has redeemed all, and will in the long run save all, including Satan himself. They adore a god made of putty or of wax,—plastic, effeminate, mollusious, with no masculine faculty about him, and no quality that entitles him to the respect of just and honest men, for a being who cannot be angry at wrong-doing is destitute of one of the essential virtues, and a moral Ruler who is not angry with the wicked, and who refuses to punish crime, is not divine. We find no such God as this modern saccharine idol when we come to search the Scriptures, for there the true God says, "If ye walk contrary to me, I will walk contrary to you." "To the froward he will show himself froward." "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." He is revealed as a God who "will by no means spare the guilty," but declares that every transgression and iniquity shall have its just punishment of reward.

Since evil obtained sway over the human race God walketh towards men, therefore, not at all as he might have done if men had never fallen. He speaketh to them in the stern accents of a Judge, and handleth them as one who sees the need of a rod. He treats men not so roughly as they deserve, for he is infinitely tender and gentle; but still with such severity as becomes necessary to show that he cannot smile on transgression. The conduct of God towards man is not like his dealing with the angels, not like his dealing with cherubim and seraphim, but, according to our text, he tears, he smites, he kills; and it is of such a God as this that I have to speak to-night, and of such acts as these I have to talk with you. My design is not that any may fly from the Lord, but that as the result of what we have to say many may return unto the Lord, who hath smitten, but who will heal; who hath slain, but who will restore.

There are three things in my text which are to my mind very clear. The first is a *smiling God*; the second is a *believing heart*, for he who used such words as my text was no unbeliever; and, thirdly, a *persuasive voice*—the voice which so pleadingly cries, "Come, and let us return

unto the Lord." May God the Holy Ghost teach me how to proclaim the name of the Lord, and render the word quick and powerful to the salvation of the blood-bought. How much I need his strength in my extreme weakness! Pray for me, ye saints of God, that once again I may faithfully and effectively do duty as one of the Lord's ambassadors.

I. First, then, in the text I see plainly enough A SMITING GOD: "He hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up."

Notice, first, that the person who wrote these words discerns the presence of the Lord, for he is *convinced that his trials come from God*. Ungodly men set down their troubles to chance, and sometimes they even trace them to the devil, as if they expected their father to have dealings with them. Frequently they lay their ills at the door of their fellow men, and grow quarrelsome, malicious, and revengeful. It is a happy day for a man when he knows in whose hand is the rod, and learns to trace his troubles to God. Alas, there are even some children of God who greatly err in this matter when under affliction; they spend their time in bewailing second causes, and do not look at the first cause. This is very brutish. If you strike a dog with a stick he will bite at the stick; had he a little intelligence he would bite at you, and know that the blow came, not from the stick or stone, but from the hand that used these implements. So is it usually with unbelievers in trouble: they look at the secondary agent, and they spend their anger or their thoughts entirely there. If in the day of adversity they would consider, they would perceive that affliction springeth not out of the ground, neither do distresses come by chance; but the hand of the Lord is in all these things. "Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it?" Whichever way the trial came, it came from him. If the trouble was caused by a triumphant enemy or by a deceitful friend, if it came as a loss in business or as a sickness of body, or if it wounded us through the arrows of death piercing the heart of our beloved, in either case it was the Lord. Learn you that lesson. *He* hath smitten you: *he* hath torn you: *he* hath done it all. He hath ordained our trials for judgment, and established them for correction; let us not despise them by refusing to see his hand or by angrily rebelling against him. We read that "Aaron held his peace" when his two sons were slain with fire, because it was the fire of the Lord that smote them, and what could he say? If even Christian men too often forget the Lord's hand, we need not be at all surprised that unconverted men do so. Perhaps I am speaking to one who has been followed by a succession of disasters till he is now surrounded by a sea of affliction. You have scarcely escaped from one trouble before you have plunged into another. It seems to you as if your "bad luck," as you call it, were no more absent from you at any time than your shadow. You cannot get on at anything; whatever you touch withers beneath your hand. You have been ill again and again. You have lost your best friend when you most needed him. You have lost your situation, and wherever you apply you get no favourable reply. It is true that you are not wise enough to trace some of these misfortunes to your own bad habits—your indolence or your drunkenness. I wish, however, you were even as wise as that, for then you might amend. If you grow wiser still you would say, "It cannot be that I am to have stroke upon stroke, and loss upon loss, without there being some reason for it: for God doth

not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." I should not wonder, my friend, that you are so sorely smitten because the Lord has some great design of love to your soul. Look at the prodigal son in the distant country. He had plenty of money, and he spent it in riotous living: he was in fine health, and lived in the fastest style. Wine and women soon took away his store, and then he said that bad luck had befallen him. Of course it had, and the young squire was obliged to swallow his dignity and independence and seek for a situation. He looked in the daily paper, and searched up and down among his dear friends who had drunk his health in bumpers of his rare old wines: they knew of nothing for him, and gave him the cold shoulder. No money-lender would grant him a loan, and no man gave unto him. He walked his shoes off his feet, but could find nothing to do. He had rags upon him and hunger within him. He was a broken down gentleman, without a trade, and without the physical strength to dig or plough. What could he do? He was "down on his luck," as men of his kind are wont to say, and nobody wanted his society. One person, who had some sort of pity for the poor wretch, found him a situation, and he commenced active life in the noble capacity of a pig feeder,—“he joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.” He was now at his lowest, for his occupation was filthy and degrading, and the wages were not enough to keep body and soul together, so that he often envied the hogs that could so readily fill themselves with husks. Yet in this deep distress there was mercy and hope: his way home was round by the swine trough. He might never have come to his father if he had not first come to those pigs and husks. Perhaps, O tried sinner, the way to God for you is through your troubles. If the Lord had prospered you in that piece of betting, for instance, or if you had got on in that infamous business which you ought never to have touched, you might have been a rich man and have been damned. But you are not to be rich: God does not mean that you should be. He means to follow with stroke upon stroke, and tearing upon tearing, till at last you shall realize that he is saying unto you, “Return unto me, for you will never rest until you do.” You shall never know prosperity until you have come clean out, and made your peace with God. Then shall your peace be as a river, and your righteousness as the waves of the sea. I am certain that I speak as though I were a prophet to the soul of some who are in this house to-night; and I pray God that, if it be so, they may look on the series of trials through which they have passed as being really sent to them, not by chance or haphazard, nor by the conjunction of the stars, nor by aught of that atheistic foolery which men are so fond of inventing, but sent from God himself with benign intent. He smites, he tears, he slays, but this is all the surgery of love. The person who uttered these words, then, had learned to trace his troubles to God.

Now, notice that *it is customary with God to smite his own*, according to his own words, “As many as I love I rebuke and chasten.” I remember being severely called to account by a fastidious critic for using the following vulgar metaphor, which I will therefore use again. It may serve for another paragraph for some other superfine reviewer. I think I said that if you were going home, and you saw a number of boys round a house breaking windows, it is ten to one that you would not care much

about what they did; but if you saw your own boy doing it, he would be sure to get as sweet a box on the ears as you could manage to convey to him. Would that be because you loved him less than the rest of the boys? Not so, but because you loved him more. You had something to do with him, and nothing to do with the rest; therefore he obtained the privilege of correction which the others missed. Now, oftentimes the sinner who falls into trouble, or the Christian who endures heavy trial, does not receive such severe treatment because the Lord is about to destroy him, but because he has a secret love to his soul. Thus saith the Lord: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for your iniquities." These chastisements and heavy blows, which are compared in the text to tearing and to smiting, often fall upon God's own beloved, because they are his beloved, and he cannot in any better way display his love to them.

"I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree"; no axe has come to his root, and no blight to his leaf; God has let him alone to fill the earth with his branches. But why? Was it not that he might become fit for the fire when the axe of the feller would lay him low. But look you at the vine which beareth fruit, and you shall see every year, at the proper season, the ruthless knife of the pruner cutting away what seems to be the liveliest shoots, removing the hopeful branches, and leaving the poor vine to bleed, or to appear to be a mere dry stick. Yes, the vine is worth pruning: it belongs to the husbandman's choice plants, and he looks to it for rich clusters. As for the green bay tree—who cared to prune it? What profit would come of blunting the knife on a fruitless tree? Go to, you who are increasing your stores, you who never have ache or pain, who say that no thought of sin will ever depress you, who can drink your fill and eat abundantly without being sick or sorry. Lo, ye are fattened like bullocks for the slaughter, and there shall nothing happen to you till death's poleaxe lays you low. Count it to be one of the most fearful curses that can happen to you to be happy in your sins. "Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed. Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will send unto him wanderers, that shall cause him to wander, and shall empty his vessels, and break their bottles." Ye who are tossed to and fro, and are broken by sorrow, need not start with dread because ye are made to suffer, for the Lord layeth heavy hands upon his own, and reserveth the ungodly for his wrath.

The dealings of God with men will often appear to be very severe. Kindly read the 14th verse of the 5th chapter. "I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear and go away." From this it is clear that our text, when it says, "He hath torn," alludes to a lion rending his prey. The Lord seems sometimes to spring upon a man and suddenly to bring him down, and then by terrible trials he appears to lacerate him from head to foot. Fears, pains of body, awful suggestions within his mind, loss upon loss in business, grief upon grief, his home desolate, his heart broken, his hope gone—such things doth the Lord lay upon men until they know what the Lord meant when he said by his prophet, "I will be unto them

as a lion ; as a leopard by the way will I observe them." God does this with men, and yet he means them no ill. The case of Hezekiah explains it all. Hear him cry in the bitterness of his soul, "I reckoned till morning, that, as a lion, so will he break all my bones : from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me. Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter : I did mourn as a dove : mine eyes fail with looking upward : O Lord, I am oppressed ; undertake for me. What shall I say ?" But his own answer to his own question is, "O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit : so wilt thou recover me, and make me to live."

The text says that the Lord *smites*. He uses such force that he leaves bruises and wales ; for "by the blueness of the wound the heart is made better." He smites, and he knows how to do it, for he is a wise corrector. "He that chastiseth the heathen shall not he correct ?" He can touch a man in his tenderest place and make the stoutest heart to quail. He knoweth our frame, and when he comes to deal with us in wrath, even though there be love behind it all, yet still he smiteth very sternly. David says : "All the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning," and in another place he shows that this chastening is no child's play, for he says, "When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth."

Yes, and according to the text, God may lay a man's soul so low that he may count himself to be as *dead* and he may continue like one in the grave by the space of two days, and yet on the third day he will raise him up. This, of course, is not to be taken literally, but represents a considerable period, though a period that hath an end, during which heart and flesh utterly fail. God knows how long to make a man lie under the sentence of death. It will not be four days ; that would be too long, for one said of old, "By this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days." There shall be three days wherein deadly despair shall rule, but destruction shall not actually take place, but like as Jesus came up out of the earth on the third day, so those who have felt the sentence of death in themselves shall come out into the joy of resurrection-life to praise and bless his name.

I perceive that I almost startle you while I show you what God doth with the sons of men. But there is one thing I ought to add. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." A man who lies in the hospital half his time hath still more mercy than he could have claimed ; and he who shivers in this winter's cold and knows bitter penury, yet still hath more mercy than he deserves. And he amongst us who sinks lowest in soul sorrow, he who seems to go down into the dread abyss till all God's waves and billows go over him, still may bless God that he is not in the torments of hell. He who suffers most may be grateful that justice has not yet taken the plummet and the line, and meted out righteous wrath. At our worst we are indulged with a fulness of mercy compared with what our transgressions deserve.

And, oh, I want to show you that there is love in it all. I do not call him a loving father who sees his boy indulge bad habits, and who never chastens him. I do not call her a loving mother who, when she has seen her child showing ill-tempers and displaying selfwill, has never chastened

her. It is often a wicked self-indulgence which prevents parents from doing what should be done to drive out wickedness and train for a noble life. When a father with the tears in his eyes, has taken his boy alone and said, "I cannot be like Eli, upon whose house there came the curse, because his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not: but I must chasten you betimes. If you will thus break my commandments and grieve God and dishonour my family, I must make you smart for it, though every stroke is a pain to me." I say when a father acts in this way he is both wise and kind. Many a young blackguard now in the streets of London might have been a moral young man if his father had done his duty by him. And, mark you, God will never have this to be laid at his door—that he permits sin in his family and leaves his chosen unchastened. His own children must feel the rod and be brought under the bond of the covenant. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."

Here let me wait a minute to recover my voice and gather a little strength, for I am very feeble. Could you, do you think, ease me for a moment by singing a verse or two of the 605th hymn in "Our Own Hymn Book," to the tune "Farrant"?

"Come let us to the Lord our God
With contrite hearts return,
Our God is gracious, nor will leave
The desolate to mourn.

His voice commands the tempest forth
And stills the stormy wave,
And though his arm be strong to smite,
'Tis also strong to save.

Long hath the night of sorrow reign'd;
The dawn shall bring us light:
God shall appear, and we shall rise
With gladness in his sight."

Tremblingly I will now endeavour to go on to secondly. May the Holy Spirit guide my mind, and heart, and tongue.

II. Secondly, I see in the text A BELIEVING HEART: to my mind a remarkably believing heart, because the man believes in the goodness of God even when he is smarting and suffering. Do notice it. He says, "Come, let us return to the Lord, for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up."

It is wonderfully easy to believe in God when you have all you want, and are free from trial, but such fair-weather faith as that is very often a mere sham. True faith believes in God when he is angry, and trusts him when the rod is in his hand; and to my mind, as I have said before, it is a very beautiful instance of faith which we have in this text. The man has been torn, yes, torn as a lion tears his victim,—there are the gashes bleeding and smarting, yet he cries, "Come, and let us return to the Lord." What, to the God who has torn us? Yes, yes. Let us go to him, for he will receive us, and will not cast us away, but, on the contrary, he will heal the wounds he made. You cannot think too well of God, nor expect too much mercy from him. Beloved, if you believe that he will pardon your greatest sin for Jesus' sake; if you

believe to-night that he will cheerfully receive you to his bosom because of his dear Son; if you believe that he can make you an heir of heaven by faith in Christ—you will not believe too well of God. I shall challenge you to try and make your thoughts of the Lord too high and honourable, and if you attempt the task you will certainly be foiled in it.

This believing heart in my text actually finds an argument in the blows of God why we should trust him. Doth he not say, "He hath torn, and he will heal us: he hath smitten, and he will bind us up"? Yes, and there is argument here. When a physician finds a man's bone badly set and breaks it again, what am I sure that he is going to do? Why, to set it, and set it right next time. When I see a physician using a very severe remedy in a very difficult case, say a blister, or some form of bleeding, or the like—I feel certain that he does not mean to leave his patient to bleed to death, and that he does not wound without a purpose. If a tent should be inserted in order that the wound may be kept open till the proud flesh is taken away, I know that the physician does not do that out of unkindness, but that he intends the good of his patient. He means to do something which for the time the patient cannot appreciate, but about which he must exercise faith. If I were at any time to be subject to the surgeon's knife I should have no hesitation in feeling that if he wounded me he would see me through the operation, and do his utmost for my restoration. Now, God is the great Surgeon of men's souls, and sometimes he has to put man upon the table and cut, and cut to the very bone, but he never means to kill. He never takes the knife of discipline except with the intent to bind up every wound he makes, and set the man upon his feet again, saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation. "Though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies."

So, you see, that he who wrote the text did well to argue from the tearing and the smiting that God must mean well to the afflicted soul.

And, do notice, such is the faith of this text that the writer expects to be restored though he writes himself down among the dead men. "After two days," saith he, "will he revive us." I know—I wonder whether you know—what it is to feel as though utterly dead to all spiritual power, all natural hope, all claim on mercy, and, sometimes even to all possibility of salvation. I may be addressing one to-night who feels as though his death-warrant had been signed and sealed. He has the sentence of death in himself. But, dear brother, still have faith, for so the text has it—"We shall live in his sight." You know what Job said: to my mind it is the grandest thing a man ever did say. He was not reigning on a throne, but sitting on a dunghill, covered with boils and scraping himself with a potsherd, yet he was more than royal. Glorious old Job bravely said, "Though he slay me yet will I trust in him." This was grand! Can you imitate it? Though you feel as if you were slain, though you sit in your pew to-night and say, "Well, it is of no use; I know I am undone," yet I charge you to trust the Lord, your Redeemer, over the head of it all. Trust the covenant God in the teeth of everything. Believe God to be true, and every fact and circumstance and thought and feeling to be a liar. Cling you still to the eternal mercy of God, who casts out none that come unto him by Jesus

Christ. Oh, it is a blessed thing to be empty, and to believe that God can fill you ; to be nothing, and to believe that he can make you his child ; to be lost, and to believe that the Lord can save you ; to feel condemned and yet to believe that Christ can justify you. Oh, to sink and sink and sink, even into the grave of all natural hope, and yet to feel that you shall rise again when the third day has come ! This is the faith of God's elect.

Notice that the faith of my text looks for brighter things, for it says, "In the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight." You are afraid of God now, perhaps, but when he comes and lifts you up out of your state of spiritual death-gloom you will delight to see him, to feel him near, to know that he has quickened you, and to spend your new life in delightful communion with him. You shall *live in his sight*. What heavenly living that must be ! Life under the eye of the Lord ! Life such as he calls life ! Life which he can look upon with pleasure ! In his presence is fulness of joy, and this his wounded ones shall know when he has healed them.

I wish I could say what I want to say, but I am very feeble, and therefore not much at ease in speaking : yet I do not know but what broken words may after all be best : when voice will not answer to mind, and we have to bring out our discourses piecemeal, the morsels may be all the sweeter to the afflicted. But this is what I want to say : do, do, I pray you, never yield to that temptation of the devil which would lead you to cry "God is dealing roughly with me : he will never save me." No, expect quite the contrary ; because of these blows and strokes, and because of your misery of heart, because of your troubled conscience, because of your inward distress, you may all the more have hope. Nothing is more dreadful than to be without sensation ; that is a token of death ; but to be broken in pieces all asunder, to feel your thoughts to be like a case of knives cutting to the very centre of your heart—this at the very least proves that life is in you still. Besides, remember that the path to joy is sorrow, the door to life is by death, the road to salvation is by condemnation in the conscience. The way to enjoy God's love is, first of all, to be troubled under God's wrath.

That brings me to my third point, upon which I must be brief, but I would be earnest. Oh, Spirit of God, enable me.

III. The text has in it A PERSUASIVE VOICE. Oh that I could say it in wooing tones ; but though the music of love is in my heart, my voice is hoarse. Bear with me, however, while I cry, "Come ! Come ! Come, let us return unto the Lord."

This persuasive voice is to be attentively regarded, in the first place, because it *pleads for a right thing*. Dear friends, if we have wandered away from God, and if God is angry with us, what ought to be our first step ? Why, to get back to God. If I had offended any man or felt that I had done him an injustice, I hope I should not need much persuasion to go to him and confess my wrong and ask him to give me his hand. I trust it is the same with you. Now, since you have grieved the Lord you ought to be the first to seek reconciliation, and if instead of it he is first and comes to you with overtures of peace, surely you should not need much persuasion to end the quarrel. Come, poor erring child, you have acted sinfully towards your loving Father ; does

not your heart itself suggest to you the resolve,—“I will arise and go unto my Father”? You have grieved him, and because you have grieved him he has smitten you that you may know for yourself the evil of your doings; let the first smittings suffice, and yield at once to his reproofs. “Come, and let us return unto the Lord.”

A great part of the persuasiveness of the text lies, not merely in the rightness of it, but in *the speaker putting himself with the people whom he entreats to return*. He says, “Come, and let us return unto the Lord.” My dear hearers, willingly enough, without any sort of mock humility, do I feel constrained to put myself among you. If you have never returned to the Lord, come let us go together, for I know the way, and have good cause to tread it o’er again. I went to him, I almost forget how many years ago, but I was only a stripling of fifteen years of age. Deeply conscious of my guilt, I sought the Lord God of my fathers in much brokenness of spirit. He had smitten me, he had torn me, he had slain me by the law of his mouth. Where could I go? I tried every helper, and I found all carnal hopes to be mockeries. I went with trembling to my God and pleaded the precious blood of Jesus, and he healed me, he bound me up, and he gave me to live in his sight. To this I bear my solemn and sure witness. But though I went to him so many years ago I have been many times since. I have felt sin upon the conscience; I have had my own inward depravity to mourn over; I have had to feel myself to be nothing, yea, and to be less than nothing; and I have been very heavy in soul; and therefore driven by distress I have gone to my Lord. Yes, I have gone to him a thousand times; and therefore I did not boast when I said I knew the way. Ah, poor helpless soul, I know your downcastings and distractings, for I know the heart of a stranger by having felt myself to be an alien to my mother’s children, unworthy to be numbered with the family of God. I have comforted God’s people, but sometimes could not comfort myself. I have tried to fill others while mourning my own emptiness. But I bear witness that I never went to my Lord in vain. Come, give me your hand, one on this side, one on that, and let us return unto the Lord. Come, let us make a ring all round the place and hand in hand let us return unto the Lord. You who do not know the way will, perhaps, be helped by brotherly sympathy as we tell you how we resolved to return. You that think yourselves the biggest, blackest sinners, you do not think so badly of yourselves as I often think, and rightly think, of myself; but though of sinners the chief and of saints the least, “I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him until that day.” And you, dear friend, though up till now you have never sought Jesus, I hope that you will seek him now and find abundant satisfaction in laying hold upon him.

Notice that *this exhortation is put in the present tense*. “Come, and let us return unto the Lord.” It is not to-morrow, it is not next year, it is so written that it means—“Let us return to the Lord *now*.” If at all, why not at once? The sooner a good thing is done the better. As far as I am concerned there is a very personal reason for pressing upon any unconverted person here that he should return to the Lord *now*. I reckon it to be a great privilege to be able to stand here and bid you come to the Lord, though the exercise of that privilege has worn me out

and made me brain-weary, and full of pain. That privilege I shall not enjoy for some little time, and it would charm me if I might win you *now*. Oh that my Lord would make this last sermon of mine for a while—perhaps for ever—to be a weight cast into the scale to decide a hesitating will for Christ. I see the balances; how evenly they are poised! I see them trembling; a decision is to be arrived at one way or the other. This scale for God—shall this go down? Is there weight enough? Satan clings to the chains of that evil scale, he seeks to drag it down, he casts in new temptations. Which will win? With all my heart would I throw earnest entreaties into the scale of right that salvation may win the day. But which shall it be? Which shall it be? Perhaps the turn it takes to-night will be the turn it takes for eternity. God grant that it may be for God, for truth, for Christ, for heaven; and not for the world, for sin, for self, and for eternal perdition. O Holy Spirit, work mightily to decide men aright.

The pleading of my text—and with this I close—is rendered all the more powerful, because it is *full of pleasing expectancy*. Imagine that you had to try to make up a quarrel, and the offending person were to say to you, “Well, suppose I agree to end this dispute, will the other party be satisfied?” Upon the answer to that question your hope of success would very greatly depend. It has sometimes been my lot to have some such work as that to do, and I have not felt quite sure that I should succeed till I had crossed that bridge. The aggrieved individual has been in a very high temper, and I could not altogether wonder, for he had been shamefully treated. “Well,” I have said, to the offender, “I will try my best, you know, and it will greatly strengthen me if I can say that you bitterly feel that you were in the wrong, and desire to offer an ample apology.” My client has said, “I should not mind going a good way, in apologising, but it can only be on the condition that I shall be kindly met. If I am to be repulsed—well, I shall not say anything until I have some idea of the temper and spirit of my opponent.” When I have been able to say “The person whom you have offended is grieved for you as much as for himself; he is quite willing to receive you at any time, and will give you every token of forgiveness; he hardly wants you to make any confession at all, he is so ready to forgive you, and nothing will give him greater pleasure than to have your friendship”: why then the other party has said, “What, does he say so? Does he speak kindly of me after what I did? Did he really say that he would be glad to see me at his house? Did he speak of me as still being his friend? Then be so good as to tell him that I am very sorry, and I will be round to say it myself directly.” Now, my God, my gracious God, bids me say that he is a God ready to pardon. You have not to go and propitiate him, and make him tender, and plead with him in prayer till you melt his heart. No: he waiteth to be gracious to you. He hath come to-night, by his poor feeble servant, to entreat you to accept his love and grace. Let my broken accents reach the ears of your hearts. Repent of sin, believe in Jesus Christ, and look to him for mercy. May God help you to do so, and to do it *now*. Do not let returning unto the Lord be left to be talked of when you get outside: return ere you rise from your seat. I dread that vain companion who waits for you at the door; I am afraid of that idle chat on the road home. Do not even allow the

exhortation of the text to wait to be thought of when you get home, for perhaps it may then be forgotten : but now, upon that seat, or standing where you are, may God help you to respond to the gracious invitation, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord ; for he hath torn, and he will heal. The third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight."

God bless you, dear friends. May his richest blessing rest upon every one of you. Other voices will be heard here for a few weeks, but none will speak more lovingly than mine, all broken, cracked, hoarse, and unmusical though it be. May those brethren who speak to you have more strength than I have, and more grace. If they shall be the means of bringing some to Jesus whom I have never reached I shall be glad indeed. I want you all, members of the church, to be very, very diligent in helping in the February meetings by your efforts and your prayers. My dear brothers Clarke and Smith are well fitted for their work. You ought to have this Tabernacle crowded every night of the week : that is what I want to hear of. Each one of you must get to work to get the outside people into the house that they may hear and live. The evangelists will be here for the best part of the month ; and if you all work hard and earnestly to gather the crowds together when those two brethren speak and sing, I do not doubt that a blessing will rest upon them like that which came upon our brethren Moody and Sankey in years gone by. Pray for me, I beseech of you, and having done so, prove the sincerity of your prayers by helping on the Lord's work ; this will be as medicine to your sick pastor's soul and body. *I rely upon you, each one, to see these services made a success, God the Holy Spirit helping you.*

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalin xxxii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—551, 109 (Mr. Charlesworth's Book, "Flowers and Fruits of Sacred Song"), 605.

A fortnight elapsed between the preaching of the above sermon and its being revised. Mr. Spurgeon is mending, and begs for the prayers of his friends that he may, ere long, be quite restored, and may return to his work in full vigour.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE PEACE OF GOD.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, JANUARY 6TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."—Philippians iv. 7.

"PEACE" is a heavenly word. When at the advent of our Lord angels came to sing among men a midnight sonnet their second note was "Peace on earth." Would God the shining ones would chant that song again till yonder Balkans heard the strain, and shook off the sulphurous cloud which now hangs around them. Those who have ever seen war, or even come near the trail of its bloody march, will be thankful to God for peace. I am almost of his mind who said that the worst peace is preferable to the very best war that was ever waged, if best there can be where all is bad as bad can be. Peace is most pleasant when religion sits beneath its shade, and offers her joyful vows to heaven. How grateful we ought to be that we can meet together to worship God after that form which best satisfies our consciences without any fear of being hunted down by the authorities of the land. We have no watchman on the hill tops looking out for Claverhouse's dragoons. We put none at the front door of our conventicle to watch lest the constable should come to take off worshipper and minister, that they may suffer imprisonment or fine. We worship God in unlimited liberty, and we ought to be exceedingly glad of the privilege, and infinitely more grateful for it than we are. Do we not sit every man under his own vine and fig tree, none making us afraid? Blessed is the land in which we dwell, and blessed are the days in which we live, when in all peace and quietness we worship God in public and sing his high praises as loudly as we please. Great God of peace, thou hast given us this peace, and in remembrance of our hunted forefathers we bless thee with our whole hearts!

We have met to-night for the purpose of hearing the gospel of peace, and many of us are afterwards coming to that sacred festival which celebrates peace, and is to all time the memorial of the great peace-making between God and man. And yet it may be that even

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all believers here are not quite at peace. Possibly you did not leave your family in peace this afternoon. Jars occur even among loving hearts. Alas ! even Sabbaths are sometimes disturbed, for evil tempers cannot be bound over to keep the peace, but are riotous even on this sweet restful day. Do Christian men ever permit angry feelings to rise within them ? If they do, I am sure that even in coming away from home to the house of God, they come with a disturbed mind. Ah, how insignificant a matter will mar our peace of mind : some little thing that happened in getting to your pew—some trifling incident even while you are in it, waiting for worship to begin, may, like dust in your eye, cause you the greatest distress. Such poor creatures are we that we may lose our peace of mind even by a word or a look. Peace, in the form of perfect calm and serenity, is a very delicate and sensitive thing, and needs more careful handling than a Venice glass. It is hard for the sea of our heart to remain long in a smooth and glassy state, it may be rippled and ruffled by an infant's breath. Perhaps, too, some of my brothers and sisters here have not been walking near to God ; and if so their peace will not be perfect. It may be, my brother, that during the week you have backslidden somewhat from your true standing ; and if so, your peace has fled. Your heart is troubled, and though you are believing in Christ for salvation, and are therefore safe, yet for all that your inward rest may be broken ; therefore would I turn the text into a prayer, and pray for myself and for every believer in Jesus Christ—that the peace of God which passeth all understanding may now keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. May you all know the text by experience. He who wrote it had felt it ; may we who read it feel it too. Paul had oftentimes enjoyed the brightness of peace in the darkness of a dungeon, and he had felt living peace in prospect of a sudden and cruel death. He loved peace, preached peace, lived in peace, died in peace, and behold he hath entered into the fruition of peace, and dwells in peace before the throne of God.

Looking at the text, and thinking how we might handle it best to our profit, I thought we would notice first of all *the unspeakable privilege*—"the peace of God, which passeth all understanding." Then, secondly, I thought that we might gather, from its connection, *the method of coming at it* ; for the preceding sentences are linked on to our text by the word "and," which is not an incidental conjunction, but is placed there with a purpose. Paul means to say that if we do what he bids us do in the fourth, fifth, and sixth verses, then the peace of God shall keep our hearts and minds. When we have looked at that matter for a few minutes, I shall want your careful attention, in the third place, to *the power of its operation*—for the peace of God "*shall keep your hearts and minds*"; and then we shall close, in the fourth place, by noticing *the sphere of its action*, namely "in Christ Jesus" : the word should have been "in" rather than "through"—"shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." May the Holy Spirit, who is the spirit of peace, now lead us into the centre and secret of our text.

I. First, then, here is AN UNSPEAKABLE PRIVILEGE—one of which it is very hard to speak, because it passeth all understanding, and therefore, you may be sure, it must pass all description. It is one of

those things which can be more readily experienced than explained. Good Joseph Stennett was right when he spoke of those who

“Draw from heaven that sweet repose
Which none but he that feels it knows.”

We may talk about inward rest, and dilate upon the peace of God, and select the most choice expressions to declare the delicacy of its enjoyment, but we cannot convey to others the knowledge at second hand; they must feel it, or they cannot understand it. If I were speaking to little children I would illustrate my point by the story of the boy at one of our mission stations who had a piece of loaf sugar given him one day at school. He had not before tasted such essence of sweetness, and when he went home to his father, he told him that he had eaten something which was wonderfully sweet. His father said, “Was it as sweet as such a fruit?” “It was far sweeter than that.” “Was it as sweet as such and such a food?” which he mentioned. “It was much sweeter than that. But father,” said he, “I cannot tell you.” He rushed out of the house back to the mission house, begged a piece of sugar, got it, and brought it back, and said, “Father, taste and see, and then you will know how sweet it is.” So I venture to use that simple illustration and say, “O taste and see that the peace of God is good,” for in very deed it surpasseth all the tongues of men and of angels to set it forth.

What is the peace of God? I would describe it first by saying it is, of course, *peace with God*, peace of conscience, actual peace with the Most High through the atoning sacrifice. Reconciliation, forgiveness, restoration to favour there must be, and the soul must be aware of it: there can be no peace of God apart from justification through the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ received by faith. A man conscious of being guilty can never know the peace of God till he becomes equally conscious of being forgiven. When his consciousness of pardon shall become as strong and vivid as his consciousness of guilt had been, then will he enter into the enjoyment of the peace of God which passeth all understanding. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ—you that have believed in Jesus—there is perfect peace between you and God now: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God.” Your sin was the ground of the quarrel; but it has gone, it has ceased to be, it is blotted out, it is cast into the depth of the sea. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Our divine scapegoat has carried our iniquities into the wilderness. Our Lord and Master has finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness. The cause of offence is gone, and gone for ever: Jesus hath taken our guilt, hath suffered in our stead, hath made full compensation to the injured law, and vindicated justice to the very highest; and now there is nothing which can excite the anger of God towards us, for our sin is removed, and our unrighteousness is covered. We are reconciled to God by Christ Jesus, and accepted in the Beloved.

Now this actual reconciliation brings to the heart a profound sense of peace. O that all of you possessed it now! O that those who know it knew it more fully! Remember, O soul, if Christ did indeed suffer in your stead and was made a curse for thee, justice can never require

at thy hands the penalty which thy Surety has discharged: for this would be to dishonour his sacrifice by making it of none effect. If Jesus stood as thy Substitute, and bore what God required as the vindication of his law, then thou art clear, beyond all hazard clear for ever, saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation. If it were not so, why was there a Substitute permitted? Did God design to tantalize mankind by permitting an ineffectual substitution? What did that Substitute accomplish after all if he did not save those for whom he died? What meaning is there in the gospel if it does not reveal an effectual atonement? But truly the Lord Jesus was made sin for us, and the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are saved. Here the soul rests: at the foot of the cross it finds a peace it never could have found elsewhere. I hope that many of you are now able to sing

“ Jesus was punish’d in my stead,
Without the gate my Surety bled
To expiate my stain :
On earth the Godhead deign’d to dwell,
And made of infinite avail
The sufferings of the man.

“ And was he for such rebels given?
He was; the Incarnate King of Heaven
Did for his foes expire :
Amazed, O earth, the tidings hear;
He bore, that we might never bear
His Father’s righteous ire.”

There take your full of peace, for by this sacrifice a covenant of peace is now established between you and your God, and it is sealed by atoning blood.

“The peace of God, which passeth all understanding” also takes a second form, namely, that of *a consequent peace in the little kingdom within*. When we know that we are forgiven and that we are at peace with God things within us come to a sudden, and delightful change. By nature everything in our inner nature is at war with itself: it is a cage of evil beasts all rending and devouring each other. Man is out of order: out of order with God, with the universe, and with himself. The machinery of manhood has fallen into serious disorder; its cogs and wheels do not work in due harmony, but miss their touch and stroke. The passions, instead of being ruled by reason, often demand to hold the reins; and reason, instead of being guided by the knowledge which God communicates by his word, chooses to obey a depraved imagination, and demands to become a separate power and to judge God himself. There is not a faculty of our nature which is not in rebellion against God, and consequently in a state of confusion with regard to the rest of our system. A cruel internal war often rages among our mental powers, animal instincts, and moral faculties, causing distress, fear and unhappiness. There is no cure for this but restoring grace. O man, you cannot get your heart right, you cannot get your conscience right, you cannot get your understanding right, you cannot bring your various powers to their bearings and make them act in true harmony till first you are right with God. The King must occupy the throne, and then

the estate of Mansoul will be duly settled, but till the chief authority has due eminence rebellion and riot will continue. When the Lord breathes peace into a man, and the Holy Spirit descends like a dove to dwell within the soul, then is there quiet: where all was chaos order appears, the man is created anew, and becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus; and though rebellious lusts still try to get the mastery, yet there is now a ruling power which keeps the man in order so that within him there is "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding."

This leads on to *peace in reference to all outward circumstances* by reason of our confidence that God ordereth them all rightly, and arranges them all for our good. The man who believes in Jesus and is reconciled to God has nothing outside of him that he needs to fear. Is he poor? He rejoices that Christ makes poor men rich. Does he prosper? He rejoices that there is grace to sanctify his prosperity lest it become intoxicating to him. Does there lie before him a great trouble? He thanks God for his promise that as his day his strength shall be. Does he apprehend the loss of friends? He prays that the trial may be averted, for he is permitted so to pray, even as David begged for the life of his child; but, having so done, he feels sure that God will not take away an earthly friend unless it be with kind intent to gather up our trust and confidence more fully to himself. Does there lie before him the prospect of speedy death? The hope of resurrection gives peace to his dying pillow. He knows that his Redeemer lives, and he is content to let his body sleep in the dust awhile. Is he reminded by Scripture of a day of judgment when all hearts shall be revealed? He has peace with regard to that dread mystery and all that surrounds it, for he knows whom he has believed, and he knows that he will protect him in that day. Whatever may be suggested that might alarm or distress the believer, deep down in his soul he cannot be disturbed, because he sees his God at the helm of the vessel holding the rudder with a hand which defies the storm. This is peculiarly advantageous in days like these when all things wear a dreary aspect. The storm signals are flying, the clouds are gathering, flashes of lightning and grumblings of distant thunder are around us. If you read the papers, wars and rumours of wars are incessant; your eyes light upon narratives of famine and drought; you see distress here, slackness of business there, and poverty and starvation in many places, and the fear creeps over you that there are dark days yet to come, and seasons in which faces will grow pale and hands hang heavy. Brethren, it is for the believer in such a case to feel no dismay, for our God is in the heavens, and he doth not forsake the throne; his purposes will be fulfilled and good will come out of evil, for at this very moment God sitteth in the council-chambers of kings, and ordereth all things according to the counsel of his will. We are not children whose father has gone to sea and left them at home without a guardian. We read just now the words, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you," and we believe that gracious word. God is most near us, and we are most safe. Though we cannot see the future, and do not wish to pry between the folded leaves of the book of destiny, we are absolutely certain that nothing is written upon the unopened page of the future which can contradict the divine faithfulness so conspicuous in the past. We are

sure that all things work together for good to them ~~that~~ love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose, and therefore our soul as to all external circumstances casts anchor and enjoys the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.

Nor is this all. God is pleased to give to his people peace *in reference to all his commands*. While the soul is unregenerate it rebels against the mind and will of God. If God forbids, the unregenerate heart longs for the forbidden thing. If God commands, the natural mind, for that very reason, refuses to do it. But when the change takes place, and we are reconciled to God by the death of his Son, then, beloved, we drop into the same line with God, and our deepest desire is to abide in full harmony with him. His will becomes our delight, and our only sorrow is that we cannot be perfectly conformed to it. There is no precept of God which is grievous to a gracious heart. His statutes are our songs in the house of our pilgrimage. We also feel perfect peace *with regard to God's providential doings*, because we believe that they are helping us to arrive at conformity with him, and that is just what we want. Oh that we could never have a thought or wish henceforth that would be disagreeable to the Lord. We now love him, we love his ways, we love his people, we love his word, we love his day, we love his promises, we love his precepts—we are altogether agreed with him through his rich grace; and in this sense we have a peace towards God which passeth all understanding.

What a wonderful description that is of this peace—it “*passeth all understanding*.” It is not only beyond a common understanding, but it passeth *all* understanding. Some have said it means that the ungodly man cannot understand it; that statement is true, but it is not a tithe of the whole meaning, for even he who enjoys it cannot understand it. It is deeper, it is broader, it is sweeter, it is more heavenly than the joyful saint himself can tell. He enjoys what he cannot understand. What a mercy that such a thing is possible, for otherwise our joys would be narrow indeed! Reason has limits far narrower than joy.

Truly this peace is hid from the eyes of the ungodly and the unbelieving; it is far above, out of their sight. Now, there are kinds of peace in the world which the ungodly man can understand. There were the Stoics, who schooled themselves to apathy; they would not feel, and so they attained a senseless peace: their secret is easily discovered, it does not pass understanding. Many a Red Indian has been as stolid as the greatest Stoic, and has, perhaps, surpassed him, in hardening himself so that he would not groan if pierced with arrows or burned with fires. Some men have had such mastery over themselves that it has seemed a matter of perfect indifference whether they suffered pain or not. But Christianity does not teach us stoicism, nor does it point in that direction; it cultivates tenderness, and not insensibility. Its influence tends to make us sensitive rather than callous, and it gives us a peace consistent with the utmost delicacy of feeling, yea, with a sensitiveness more intense than other men know, since it makes our conscience more tender, and causes the mind to be deeply distressed by the slightest frown of heaven. Our peace is not the peace of apathy, but one of a far nobler sort. Others have aimed at the peace of levity, which the world can readily understand. They count it one of the

wisest things to drive dull care away, and whatever happens of ill they drown reflection in the flowing bowl and laugh over it—making mirth when misery devours their souls. Christians do not attempt to get rid of the trials of life in that fashion. The world, therefore, cannot understand the believer's peace, since he is neither apathetic nor frivolous.

Whence comes this peace? The jaunty answer of many a worldling is, "Oh, it comes from some fanatical delusion." But, indeed, we are not deluded. The grounds of a Christian's peace are rational, logical, and well grounded. They are to be justified by common sense. A person who has been in debt, and who is still in debt, ought not to be at peace; but suppose a man is found to be perfectly at his ease, who can blame him if he can say, "I have a right to be so, for my debt is paid"? No one can challenge such an argument. He who believes that Christ Jesus suffered in his stead that which was due to God's justice, has a rational argument for being at peace which he may plead anywhere he pleases. God has forgiven for Christ's sake all his iniquity, why should he not be at peace? And if it be indeed so—that the Christian has become the child of God, ought he not to be at peace? If God his Father rules all things for his good, ought he not to be at peace? If for him there remains no hazard of eternal death—if for him there is prepared a glorious resurrection, and if he is ultimately to shine with Christ in eternal glory, why should not the man have peace? It is far more difficult, I should think, rationally to blame him for his happiness than it would be to justify him if he were in alarm. We are not victims of delusion, but speak the words of truth and soberness when we claim to be the most favoured of mankind; the folly and the fanaticism lie with those who neglect God and eternity, and make a mock at sin.

Hence the worldling does not understand our peace, and frequently sneers at it because he is puzzled by it. Even the Christian is sometimes surprised at his own peacefulness. I know what it is to suffer from terrible depression of spirit at times; yet at the very moment when it has seemed to me that life was not worth one single bronze coin, I have been perfectly peaceful with regard to all the greater things. There is a possibility of having the surface of the mind lashed into storm while yet down deep in the caverns of one's inmost consciousness all is still: this I know by experience. There are earthquakes upon this earth, and yet our globe pursues the even tenor of its way, and the like is true in the little world of a believer's nature. Why, sometimes the Christian will feel himself to be so flooded with a delicious peace that he could not express his rapture. He is almost afraid to sing, lest even the sound of his voice should break the spell; but he says to himself,

"Come, then, expressive silence, muse his praise."

Satan has breathed a whisper into the mind—"It is too good to be true;" but the spirit, firmly believing in the truthfulness of God, has repelled the insinuation, and rested, in the faithfulness of God, in the eternal covenant, in the finished work of Christ, in the love of God manifested towards his people in Christ Jesus. This is the peace of God. "So he giveth his beloved sleep." It is a rest with an emphasis, rest in Jesus' sense when he said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are

heavy laden, and I will give you rest"—rest in the most golden sense that we can ever give to the word, and much more. It passeth understanding, but it does not surpass experience. Do you know it? Pray answer the question each one for himself, for I must come back to where I started from. It is not to be described: it must be tested to be known.

II. Now, I must, in the second place, with very much brevity, indicate, beloved friends, HOW THIS PEACE IS TO BE OBTAINED.

Now, mark you, the apostle was addressing himself only to believers in the Lord Jesus, and I must beg you to take heed to the limitation. I am not now addressing myself to the ungodly: I speak to Christians alone. You are always at peace with God, though you do not always enjoy the sense of it; but if you wish to realize it, how are you to do so? The connection tells you. In the fourth verse Paul says, "*Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice.*" If you want to have peace of mind make God your joy, and place all your joy in God. You cannot rejoice in yourself, but you ought to rejoice in God. You cannot always rejoice in your circumstances, for they greatly vary, but the Lord never changes. "Rejoice in the Lord alway." If you have rejoicing in earthly things you must indulge it moderately; but rejoicing in the Lord may be used without the possibility of excess, for the apostle adds, "Again I say, Rejoice"—rejoice, and rejoice again. Delight yourselves in the Lord. Who has such a God as you have? "Their rock is not as our Rock, our enemies themselves being judges." Who has such a Friend, such a Father, such a Saviour, such a Comforter as you have in the Lord your God? To think of God as our exceeding joy is to find "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding."

Go on to the fifth verse, where the apostle says, "*Let your moderation be known unto all men*"; that is to say, While all your joy is in God, deal with all earthly things on the principle of caution. If any man praises you, do not exult; if, on the contrary, you are censured, do not let your spirit sink. If you have prosperity, thank God for it, but do not be sanguine that it will continue. If property be yours, take it, but do not let it become your treasure or the chief consideration of your mind. Do you suffer adversity? Pray God to help you, but do not be so cast down as to despair. Drink of earthly cups by sips; do not be foolish like the fly which drowns itself in sweets. Use the things of time as not abusing them. Do not wade far out into the dangerous sea of this world's comfort. Take the good that God provides you, but say of it, "It passeth away," for indeed it is but a temporary supply for a temporary need. Never suffer your goods to become your god. Rejoice in God alone, and as for all else, come or go, rise or fall, let it neither distress you nor make you exult. Take matters quietly and calmly, and if you do that you will have peace. If you idolize any earthly good your peace will depart, but keep the world under your feet, and the peace of God shall keep your heart and mind.

Three rules are then added by the apostle, which you will be sure to recollect. He tells us to *be careful for nothing, to be prayerful for everything, and to be thankful for anything*. Anyone who can keep these three rules, with the other two, will be quite sure to have a peaceful mind. "Be careful for nothing"; that is—leave your care with God. Having done your best to provide things honest in the sight of all men,

take no distressing, disturbing, anxious thought about anything, but cast your burden on the Lord. Then pray about everything, little as well as great, joyous as well as sad. "In every thing by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known unto God." That which you pray over will have the sting taken out of it if it be evil, and the sweetness of it will be sanctified if it be good. The tribulation which you pray over will become bearable, even if it be not changed into a subject for rejoicing. A trouble prayed over is a dead lion with honey in the carcase.

And then we are bidden to be thankful for anything, for the apostle says, "In every thing with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Thankfulness is the great promoter of peace; it is the mother and nurse of restfulness. Doubtless, our peace is often broken because we receive mercies from God without acknowledging them: neglected praises sour into unquiet forebodings. If we render to the Lord the fragrant incense of holy gratitude we shall find our soul perfumed with the sweet peace of God.

Take those five things, then, as the connection sets them before you. Pile up all your joy into the sacred storehouse of your God, and be glad in the Lord. Next, leave, as much as you can, the things of this world alone; touch them with a light finger—"Let your moderation be known unto all men." And then pray much, care for nothing, and bless God from morning to night. In such an atmosphere shall peace grow as rare flowers and fruits bloom beneath sunny skies in well-watered gardens. May the Holy Spirit work these things in us and cause us to rest.

III. This brings me to the third point of our subject to-night, which was THE OPERATION OF THIS BLESSED PRIVILEGE UPON OUR HEARTS.

It is said that the peace of God will keep our hearts and minds. The Greek word is *phroureo*, which signifies keeping guard, keeping as with a garrison: so completely and so effectually does the peace of God keep our hearts and minds. Look, then: our *hearts* want keeping, keeping from sinking, for our poor spirits are very apt to faint, even under small trials. They also want keeping from wandering, for how soon are they beguiled! What feeble charms are able to attract us away from the altogether lovely One! Our hearts need keeping up, and keeping right. The way to keep the heart, according to the text, is to let it be filled with the peace of God which passeth all understanding. A quiet spirit, calm, restful, happy, is one that will neither sink nor wander: how can it? If the peace of God be in you, what can cause you distress? You will be like those great buoys moored out at sea, which cannot sink; it matters not what storms may be raging, they always rise above all. Our souls, moored fast and rendered buoyant with peace, will be as fixed marks whereby others may know their way. Moreover, a man who has his heart full of peace is not likely to wander, for he says to himself, "Why should I wander? Where can such sweetness be found as I have tasted in my Lord? Why should I seek elsewhere?" The best way to keep a person in your service is to make it worth his while to stop; and if he is so happy and so content that he feels he could not better himself, you are likely to retain him for many a long day. Now, our Lord and Master has made his service such that we could not better ourselves. When he said to some of his servants "Will ye also go away?"

they said, "To whom shall we go?" Ah, indeed! to whom could we go? Eyes, will you leave the light for the thick darkness? Ears, will ye turn away from the music of Jesus' voice? Heart, wilt thou leave a faithful lover for a deceiver? Understanding, wilt thou go abroad after novelties when thou hast found the old, sure, satisfactory truth? Conscience, wilt thou burden thyself again with thy former load? When thou art so perfectly satisfied with the work and person of Christ wilt thou not stay where thou art? Oh yes, the heart is held with bands as strong as they are tender when it is full of the peace of God which passeth understanding. You young people get tempted, I know, and who among us does not? And the world has many charms for you. I recommend you, therefore, to pray the Lord to maintain your happiness in Christ, your joy in the Lord, for if you get out of heart with regard to your Lord and Master, it may be the devil may catch you when you are bad tempered and cross-grained towards your great Lord, and entice you away from your allegiance; but if your heart is always peaceful you will have a strength about you with which to resist the suggestions of the evil one. Rivets of peace are good fastenings for Christian loyalty. It is a very serious thing for a Christian to be in an uncomfortable state, for he is then weak in an important point. "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people," are God's words to his prophets, because he knows that when we lose comfort, or lose peace, we lose one of the most valuable pieces of armour of which our panoply is composed.

But the text also adds that this will keep our *mind* as well as our heart. Now in all ages we find that the minds of Christians have been apt to be disturbed and vexed upon vital truths. I think sometimes that this is the worst age for error which has ever darkened the world. I get distressed and bowed to the earth as I see the treachery of ministers, professed ministers of Christ, who deny the inspiration of Scripture and lay the axe at the very root of all the doctrines which we hold dear, while yet they continue to occupy Christian pulpits. But when I look back all through history I find it was always so. From the days of Judas Iscariot until now there have been traitors and there have been men of ready speech and of quick thought who have used both fair speech and subtle thought to turn away simple minds from the gospel, insomuch that they would deceive, if it were possible, the very elect. But why are not the elect deceived? As a rule it is because they find such peace—such perfect peace—in the truths which they have received, that deceivers vainly attempt to entice them away from it. "Ah," cries the restful believer, "I cannot give up the gospel. It is my life, my strength, my solace, my all. It was the comfort of my dying mother, and it remains the mainstay of my aged father. It was that which brought me to a Saviour's feet and gives me grace to remain there. It has helped me in the hour of trial again and again. I feel I want its consolations, and therefore I can never part with it." And so he grows indignant with the man who casts a doubt thereon, especially if he be of the clerical order, and a pretender to the Christian ministry. Brethren, we cannot move one single inch from the truth which we have been taught by the Holy Ghost in our soul, and it is only such truth as that which can bring into the heart the peace of God which passeth understanding. When the Lord has brought his own truth into our minds

by his own power and made the sweet savour of it to pervade our frame, and given us to drink thereof till we have been filled with joy and peace unutterable, we cannot, then, depart from it. Truth taught us by man we may forget, but that which the Holy Ghost engraves upon the inmost heart we cannot depart from. So help us God, we *must* stand to it, even if we die for it.

And what are the inventions they offer us instead of the choice things of the covenant of peace? They are trifles light as air. If they were true they would not be worth propagating: they might be left among the minor matters which are of no practical value to the sons of men. They bring us no new grounds of solid peace or fresh discovered arguments for holy joy. The negative theology promises no blessings to mankind; it is an empty-handed plunderer, robbing us of every solace, but offering nothing in return. If modern thought could be proved to be true the next thing that ought to be done would be to hang the world in sackcloth, because such vanity of vanities has taken the place of the delightful truth which once gladdened the hearts of men. It were the saddest of all facts if we were assured that the doctrines of grace are after all a fiction. But they are not so. They cannot be: they bear their own witness within themselves. Some of us can speak about them as Christian replied to Atheist, when Atheist said, "Go back: go back!" Christian's reply was, "We are seeking the Celestial City." "Oh," said Atheist, "but I have gone farther than any of you, and I tell you that there is no such place. I have met with many learned men who have studied the whole matter, and it is all a delusion. Go back: go back." Then Christian said, "What! No Celestial City? Did we not see it from the top of Mount Clear, when we were with the shepherds and looked through the telescopic glass?" So we say—No atonement? Have we not felt the peace with which it soothes the conscience? No regeneration? Are we not ourselves the living evidence that men are made new creatures in Christ Jesus? No answers to prayer? Surely then we are not sane men at all, and our senses have failed us. No final perseverance? What then has kept us to this day? No work of the Holy Ghost? What? Are we asleep? Is even our existence a delusion? No, as we rub our eyes we feel that we have not been dreaming, but we feel sure that some other people are dozing and doting, and we pray that God in mercy may end their dream, and bring them to know those glorious and substantial verities which fill us with the peace of God which passeth all understanding, and in so doing keep our hearts and minds. We are bound to the cross for ever, nailed to the wood with Christ for ever. The blood-red colours of the atonement are fastened to our masthead, to fly there till our vessel sinks, if sink it must, but never to be struck, though man or devil, priest or philosopher, fire hot shot into our vessel. We dare not change, but stand faithful to that which Jesus has taught us, at whose feet we sat in our youth, and who continues to teach us still. His peace keeps our heart and mind, and therefore we will with heart and mind keep his truth, come what may.

IV. Lastly, let us observe THE SPHERE OF ITS ACTION.

The text says, "In Christ Jesus." Now, beloved, I beg you to note this with interest. The apostle never mentions the name of Jesus too

often. You cannot say that he drags it in, but he mentions it as often as ever he can, for he delights in the sound of it. "In Christ Jesus." These words touch every point of our text all the way through. Are we speaking of ourselves? We are in Christ Jesus. Our faith has realised our union with his sacred person. He is our head, and we are his members; he is the corner-stone, and we are built upon him. There is nothing about ourselves worth thinking of apart from him; and it will be well if we dismiss the thought.

Then if we dwell upon the peace of God, we still think of our Lord Jesus, for it is all in him. No peace is to be found out of Christ. No peace can warm our heart while we forget Christ. "He is our peace." Never go, dear brethren and sisters, for your peace to the law or to your own experience, to your own past achievements, or even to your own faith. All your peace is in Jesus.

And then our hearts and our minds, mentioned in the text, must all be in Jesus: the heart loving him, and loved of him; the mind believing him, resting in him, using its faculties for him,—all in him. If I leave that last thought with you it will be the best ending for my sermon: namely, that to get peace, and to get your hearts and minds kept, the grand necessity is to be in Christ—in your dying, risen, reigning Lord. Let him be upon your thoughts now and always. His table is now spread, come hither to commune with him. Come hither with your Master, to see your Master, and to eat his flesh, and drink his blood, after a spiritual fashion, at his own table.

A word to you who do not know our Lord. How I wish you did know him. You can never possess peace till you possess Christ. What a blessed beginning of Sabbaths it would be to your souls if you were to seek Christ to-night. You have not far to go to find him. He is not far from any of us. Cover your eyes and breathe a prayer to him. Stand behind one of the columns outside, or get into the street and let your heart say, "Saviour, I want peace, and peace I can never have till I have found thee. Behold, I trust thee. Manifest thyself to me at this moment and say unto my soul, 'I am thy salvation.'" God grant you may so pray. It seems to me very wonderful that we should need to persuade men to think of their own interests, and to care for their own selves. In other things they are always sharp enough to look after what they call "number one," but when it comes to the most solemn concern, the greatest blessing, and the purest happiness that can be had, they are so foolish as to let all things else attract them more than the Lord Jesus. The Lord save you all for his infinite mercy's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John xiv.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—711, 728.

EARNEST prayer is desired for the special services now being held at the Tabernacle, and also for Mr. SPURGEON, that he may be fully restored, and may return to his people in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of peace. He is already greatly improved in health.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

OFFENDED WITH CHRIST.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me."—Matthew xi. 6.

THE connection of the passage assists us in feeling its force. John had sent his disciples to ask the Master whether he was indeed the Messiah, and the Saviour, after giving abundant proof that he was the sent one who had long been promised, then adds, "And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." Had John begun to suspect a stumbling-block in reference to the Nazarene? Did he question if so lowly a person could indeed be the promised Christ? Had he expected Messiah to be a glorious prince with an earthly kingdom? Was he staggered to find himself in prison under Herod's power? Was John himself in doubt, and did the Saviour, therefore, say, "Blessed is he whosoever is not made to stumble concerning anything about me"? There have been many surmises as to why and wherefore John sent his disciples, and perhaps we shall never know, and need not wish to know, seeing it did not please God to leave it on record. Some have said he sent the messengers for his own sake, for he was then under a fainting fit of unbelief. I hardly think so, and yet it is possible, for John was an Elijah-like man—a man of stern iron mould, and such men are apt to have occasional sinkings of a terrible sort. With most of the children of God their weakness is most seen where their strength lies. Elijah failed in courage, though he was one of the most courageous of men. After he had slain the priests of Baal he was afraid of a woman—afraid of Jezebel, and fled to hide himself, and said, "Let me die: I am no better than my fathers." It seems to be a law of nature that the strongest men should have the worst fits of weakness. Martin Luther's life is remarkable as illustrating this. He fainted as few men ever fainted: his despair on some occasions was almost equal to his confidence at other times. So it is possible that John, being of that class of men, after having boldly confronted Herod and declaring "It is not lawful for thee to have thy

brother's wife," may have fainted in spirit when he found himself shut up in prison with no known and manifest token of Messiah's kingdom coming. Prison may have been a severe trial to the Baptist; we are all affected by the atmosphere in which we dwell. To-day has been a very heavy day to many a spirit, because the atmosphere has been loaded with damp and smoke. I do believe that there is more than a little truth in the rhyme,

"Heaviest the heart is
In a heavy air,
Every wind that rises
Blows away despair."

Now John the Baptist, after living in the wilderness in the open air by the river side, must have felt a strange difference when he was shut up in the close, oppressive dungeon of Herod, and the body may have helped to act upon the soul, and so the mind, after its extraordinary tension in the great service to which John was called, may have been dragged down by the half stifled body till faith began to tremble. And so it may be that John, for his own satisfaction, found it necessary to ask, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" If so, the Saviour well said, "Blessed is he that is not offended in me"; for, after all, notwithstanding his severe trial and deep depression, John was not really offended in Christ; he was not actually scandalized as to the Lord whose forerunner he had been, but he held on to his testimony and sealed it with his death. Blessed is his memory as that of one who was not offended in Christ.

Others, however, think that John sent these disciples not at all for his own sake, but for theirs, and that strikes me as being the more probable. He wished to transfer them from himself to his Lord, and he, therefore, bade them go and enquire for themselves. He felt that the answer which Jesus would be sure to give would be the best means of convincing them that they ought to follow the servant no longer, but cast in their lot with his Master. Our Lord after showing that he was indeed the Messiah, by working miracles in their presence and preaching the gospel, then said to them, "And blessed is he, whosoever is not offended in me. You see me here despised and rejected of men, notwithstanding that I work miracles. You see that I am called Beelzebub and treated with the utmost scorn. You shall be blessed if, believing me to be the Christ of God, you follow me without being staggered at anything you see, or annoyed at anything you are called to bear for my sake."

Whatever may have been John's motive, the text will, I trust, serve us for a useful purpose. May we be among the number of those who are blessed because we are not offended in Christ; and let us now look at various characters that we may know to which class we belong.

First, *there are some who are so offended with Christ that they never accept him as their Saviour at all.* Secondly, there is another class of persons *who, after professing to accept him, and apparently casting in their life-lot with him, are, after all, scandalized.* They find stumbling-blocks, and go back and forsake the way which they professed to tread. But then, thirdly, there are others who, by the grace of God, *take Christ as he is with all their hearts and are not offended in him,* and these are they that

are blessed in very deed, and shall enter into eternal blessedness in heaven.

I. First, then, I shall try to speak, and God help me to speak effectually, TO SOME WHO ARE SO OFFENDED IN CHRIST THAT THEY NEVER TRUST HIM AT ALL, OR ACCEPT HIM AS THEIR SAVIOUR. Let us tell the reasons why some men do not receive Christ and are offended in him. O that the Spirit of God may drive these unreasonable reasons from their souls, and lead them to Jesus.

Some in his own day were offended with him because of *the humbleness of his appearance*. They said, "He is the son of a carpenter. His father and his mother we know, and his brothers, are they not all with us? When Messiah cometh we know not whence he is, but as for this man, we know from whence he is." He came among them as a mere peasant. He wore the ordinary raiment of the people: a garment without seam, woven from the top throughout, stood him in good stead; no soft raiment and gorgeous apparel decorated and distinguished him. He did not affect any dignity; he came with no chariot and horses and pomp of a prince. He was meek and lowly. Even in the grandest day of his triumph he rode upon a colt, the foal of an ass, and, therefore, they said, "Is this the Son of David? Is this the King, the glorious one, of whom prophets spoke in ages long gone by?" And so they were scandalized and offended in him because there was a lack of that earthly glory and splendour for which they had looked. Men feel in the same manner now. There are some who would be Christians, but then Christianity must be a very respectable thing; and if the truth is to be found amongst poor people, well, then, the truth may keep there for them, for they will not go with it to hear a plain preacher and mix with common people. If truth walks the streets in silver slippers then they do not mind owning it and walking with it; but if it toils in rags through the by-lanes, and by miry pathways, then they say, "I pray thee have me excused." The religion of Jesus Christ never was, nor ever can be, the religion of this present evil world. He has chosen a people out of the world who believe it, but the world itself has always hated it. Did not our Lord tell us (John xiv. 17), concerning the Spirit of truth, that the world cannot receive him, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him? Whenever you find a religion which unites itself with pomp and show and worldly power, if there be any truth in it at all, it has, at any rate, deteriorated from the standard of its purity, and is not according to the mind of Christ. But there are some who are so fond of everything that is fashionable—everything that is great and famous—that, if the Lord Jesus Christ be despised and rejected of men, they despise and reject him too. Ah, but I hope that I address some to whom the Lord has given a nobler spirit. Some men and women I hope are here to-night who will never reject the truth because it is unfashionable, or refuse to follow Christ because he is despised. No, but the noble spirit says, "Is it right? Then I will espouse it. Is it true? Then I will believe it in the name of God. Though it may mean poverty and shame, yet that is the side on which I will enlist." There is a lordlier chivalry than all the chivalry of war: it is the chivalry of the heart that dares be nailed to the cross with Christ sooner than turn

aside to seek flowery pathways and follow the trail of the serpent. Yet many do reject Christ because of the humbleness of his exterior. Who is on the Lord's side, and will dare avow it before a scoffing world?

Again, there are others who reject him because of *the fewness of his followers*. They like to go where the many go and they say, "Well, but there are so few that go that way, I do not wish to be singular." Yet every honest heart must own that truth never could be decided by votes yet, for, as a rule, it has been in the minority. If we are to count heads we must go to the Pope, or the Sultan, or the Brahmin. For my part I think that a minority of one with Christ is stronger than a majority of fifty millions against him, for Christ, the Son of God, in his own person, sums up a total greater than all the multitudes that ever can be against him. There are some who quite forget that our Lord has said, "Broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat;" and again, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." The way that leadeth to life eternal, though it be the King's highway, is often as little frequented as a country lane. If you must be on the side of the majority, then you will certainly be on the side of deadly error, unless there should come some happier times, when the Lord has more greatly increased the number of his people than at the present. May you be spared to see such days, but those days have not come as yet; and if you will not go with the Lord until the multitudes are with him, you will perish in your sin. Do not, I pray you, therefore stumble at him because of this.

Some are offended with Christ for quite another reason, namely, because of *the grandeur of his claims*. He claims to be God over all, blessed for ever. He counted it not robbery to be equal with God though he made himself of no reputation, but took upon him the form of a servant. Now some spirits cavil greatly at this. They did so in his own day. They took up stones to stone him because he made himself equal with God. Proud, carnally wise minds cannot endure the doctrine that the Redeemer is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, very God of very God. To my mind it is a reason why I accept him. If he were not God, how could he save *me*. The weight of my sins would stagger all the angels and cherubim and seraphim if they should try to lift it. I must have a God to save me, or saved I never can be, and to me it is the greatest consolation possible that he who was the son of Mary is also the Son of God; that though human, even as we are human, sin excepted, he was altogether divine. Oh do not, do not be offended with him because of this, but the rather rejoice in Immanuel, God with us, and trust your soul in his hands.

A certain number of unconverted men are grievously offended with our Lord because of *his atonement*. This which to us is the very centre of all his excellence—that he saves us by standing in our stead, and bearing the wrath of God on our behalf—this is dreadfully kicked at by some; and I have heard these fastidious people finding fault with ministers for talking too much of *the blood*. They cannot endure the very term "the precious blood of Christ." We shall never listen to their fastidiousness, not for a single moment; but if we knew such to be

present we would go out of our way on purpose to shock them, because we think that no respect should be shown to such a wicked taste. If the doctrine of the atonement be kicked at, the answer of Christ's minister should be to preach the atonement again and again and again in the plainest possible terms, and declare with even greater vigour and frequency the glorious substitutionary sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ in the room, place, and stead of his people. This is the very heart of the gospel, and should be preached in your hearing every Sabbath-day at the least. Leave that out? You have left out the life of the gospel, for "the blood is the life thereof." Without shedding of blood there is no remission, and therefore, as remission is the great privilege of the gospel, we have no salvation to declare, and we have no remission to preach, unless the blood

"From his riven side which flowed"

be continually set forth before you. Oh, why should men cavil at that which is their salvation? If they ever be redeemed it must be, "not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." If they ever are cleansed from all sin it must be because of that divine declaration, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." May we never stumble at Christ because of his cross, for that were to reject our only hope, that were to quarrel with our life, that were to insist upon shutting the gates of mercy upon our own souls, that were to become enemies to our best friend and to ourselves. God save us from such an infatuation as that!

We have found a good many also who are offended with Christ for a different reason altogether, namely, because of *the graciousness of the gospel*. It has too much free grace in it for them. They would like a mangle-mangle of grace and works. You will constantly hear it said that the doctrine of justification by faith is very dangerous, and ought to be preached with great caution. Occasionally our secular papers, which, as you know, understand a great deal about religion, will instruct us as to what we should preach. The moral virtues ought to be our main theme, and justification by faith should be so qualified as to be virtually denied. It is very wrong, they say, to sing that hymn

"Nothing, either great or small,
Nothing, sinner, no;
Jesus did it, did it all,
Long, long ago";

and to tell the sinner that until he believes in Jesus Christ

"Doing is a deadly thing:
Doing ends in death,"

is regarded as a crime so manifest that it needs only to be mentioned, and every reader of the paper will be dreadfully shocked; and yet the editor of the paper, or the writer, probably, calls himself a Protestant, and justification by faith is the one doctrine upon which all Protestantism turns. Very likely the writer of the stinging article calls himself a churchman, and yet the doctrine of the Church of England about that matter is as plain as words could possibly make it. Yes,

and then they suppose us to be some modern sect of revivalists that have newly sprung up, although we are preaching that which is and always was the gospel, the doctrine by which you may test whether a church stands or falls—salvation, not by the works of the law, but according to the grace of God. Crowds of people cannot endure *grace*. And as to the term “free grace,” they say that it is a tautological expression. It may be so, but it is a very expressive term, and because they do not like it I always intend to use it. It will do them good to be made to know that we mean it, and therefore use doubly strong language. It shall not only be “gratis,” which is free, but “free gratis”; and we will, one of these days, put something else on to make it plainer still, if possible, and say, “free, gratis, for nothing.” Salvation through eternal love, salvation through mercy alone; salvation, not of merit, salvation, not of the will of man, nor of blood, nor of the flesh, but salvation by the eternal purpose of divine sovereignty, salvation by the will of God, who has said, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion,”—this we will preach evermore. Grace free as the air, spontaneous, undeserved, but given of God because he delighteth in mercy. Ay, they kick against this; but, if they knew themselves, they would know that nothing else will ever suit the sinner but this. He who has broken the divine law is never in a right state of heart till he feels salvation by himself to be hopeless, till he is shut up in the condemned cell and hears the sentence read against him, condemning him to die, and knows that nothing that he can do can by any possibility reverse that sentence, and then sees Jesus interposing in all the freeness of his love, and saying, “Now thou hast nothing to pay. I frankly forgive thee all.” Grace is the glory of the gospel. Do not be offended with it, I pray you, or you will be offended with your own life.

Then, on the other hand, there is another class of persons who are offended with our blessed Lord and Master because of *the holiness of his precepts*. Alas that there should be traitors in the camp who can get on very well with grace and free grace, but then, alas, they turn it into licentiousness and take liberty to sin because of the freeness of divine mercy. If you begin to declare that “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord,” if you preach, as Jesus did, that he who forgiveth not his brother abideth in death; if you tell them that the omission of these outward virtues will prove that the inward life is absent, if you declare that the axe is laid to the root of the trees and every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire, if you go on to insist upon it that there must be the outward marks and evidences of saintship or else the pretence of experience is a mere lie—then by-and-by they are offended and exhibit a bitter spirit. Oh that none of us may act so. The highest holiness is the delight of the true believer. If he could be absolutely perfect he would rejoice above measure. It will be his heaven to be perfect, and the one thing he strives after here below is to get the mastery over all sin; not that he hopes to be saved by that, but because he is saved, and being saved, out of love to Jesus Christ, he desires to adorn the doctrine of God his Saviour in all things. May we never be offended by the purity and perfectness of our Lord and his teaching.

I might continue this long list of things by which men have been offended with Christ—some because the gospel is so mysterious, they say, and others because it is so very simple that it is not deep enough for such great intellects as theirs. Men, if they want to be offended with Christ, will be sure to find something or other to quarrel with. They stumble at this stumbling-stone, "Whereunto also," says the Lord very solemnly, "they were appointed." They put this stumbling-block in their own way, and God appoints that they shall fall. They fall upon it now and are broken, and one of these days that stone will fall on them and grind them to powder.

My dear hearers, I cannot stay longer on this subject, but if there are any of you that are offended with Christ, I pray the Lord to make you feel your extreme folly and wickedness. Offended with the Redeemer! What madness! May you go and confess this insult to your Saviour, and accept him at this very moment as your all in all.

II. Now I want to speak to professing Christians. THERE ARE SOME WHO JOIN THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST WHO AFTER A TIME ARE OFFENDED. Now, why is it that some who profess to know him are offended with Christ?

Well, with some it is because *the novelty wears off*. Very earnest services were held, and they were greatly affected, and they thought that they repented and believed; so they joined the church. Now the good men are gone who held the services, and everything seems rather flat after such excitement, and so they have gone back again. They jumped into religion like a man into a bath, and they have jumped out again, put on their clothes, and gone back to the world and to what they were before. Persons of this sort are very plentiful just now. If they were ever born again, they were born with a fever upon them, and if you do not keep up the heat, and let them live in an oven, they will die. We know that such hothouse plants will never pay for the fuel used in forcing them; we are grieved that it is so, but we have seen it so often that we do not wonder at it so much as we did. Hot weather breeds flies, and warm showers bring out reptiles.

There are not a few who professed to become Christians and who *thought that they were always going to be happy*. The evidence that they gave of being Christians was "that they felt so happy." I do not know that mere happiness is any evidence of being a Christian at all, for many are living far from God and yet account themselves very happy, while some of those who live near to God are groaning because they cannot get nearer still. Yet a joyful feeling is by many regarded as conclusive evidence of salvation, and they add to this the notion that as soon as ever they believed in Jesus Christ the conflict was all over, and there remained nothing more to be done in the way of resisting sin and denying the lusts of the flesh. They dreamed that they had only to start on pilgrimage and get to the Celestial City in a trice—only to draw the sword from the scabbard and all Canaan was conquered in an hour. Very soon they find that it is not so. Their old corruptions are alive; the flesh begins to pull a different way from that which they profess to have chosen, the devil tempts them and they are so disappointed by their new discovery that they become offended with Christ altogether. A sudden victory would

suit them, but to carry a cross before winning a crown is not to their mind.

Others of them have met an *opposition they did not expect* from their adversaries, while from their friends they have not met with all the respect that they think they ought to have. Their friends and acquaintances have laughed at them ; their workmates in the shop have jeered at them ; they did not reckon on this, they never counted the cost, and so they are offended with Christ. Is it not a strange thing that we who begin our religion at the cross, if we begin aright, should ever be astonished that the cross keeps close to us, or should be surprised that the world treats us with disdain ? But so it is. Persecution arises, and many are offended. It is not that they burn them to death, or put them in prison. No, no, they only make a joke or two, or they give them the cold shoulder, and shut them out of society, but the poor creatures are so thin-skinned that they cannot endure even these light afflictions ; and so they are offended, and miss the blessing. When they joined the Christian church everybody was so glad to see them at the first, as we always are when there is a new-born child ; but many more new converts have come since then, and the former ones feel that they are not made so much of as they were, and so they become annoyed, and under one pretence or another slink away. Because Christ's people do not carry them about as wonders, and cry "Hosanna" over them all their days, they are ready to go back to the world and complain that they have been disappointed with religion and with Christians. Oh, but this is naughty : this is a wrong spirit which must by no means be countenanced ; yet I fear it is to be seen in many places. This is an offence which ought never to arise.

We have known some who have become offended with Christ, or were in great danger of it because *they began to find that religion entailed more self-denial than they had reckoned upon*. The precepts of our blessed Master come very close home to their consciences and gall them somewhat. He told them that the yoke was easy and that the burden was light, and so it is to the meek and lowly in heart, but they are not changed in heart, and therefore they find the burden heavy and the yoke galling. I do not wonder that it is so, for that which is the delight of the renewed heart is bondage to the regenerate spirit, and self-denials, which really are no denials at all to the man who is born again, are an iron bondage to those who still remain in their unregenerate state ; they get offended and they go away from the Master whom they professed to serve.

I have known some good souls almost offended at the Master through *the hard speeches of those who ought to have encouraged them*. I was speaking not long ago with a young lady who had for some time been devoting herself very earnestly to the cause of Christ. I do not know one who had done more than she had done in her own sphere ; but she was in great distress because the person with whom she had worked for many months had spoken very bitterly of her. Though she had been his best helper he seemed to regard her as his worst enemy ; and as she told me what he had said, I was very sorry, but the worst part about it was the temptation which the devil put in her way. The evil one whispered, "Never take a prominent place again. Give up your work."

You are said to be officious ; now be quiet, and do nothing." Now, it will happen to all of us more or less that if we try to be zealous in the Master's cause we shall be misunderstood ; wet blanket manufactories are pretty numerous, and some benevolent brother is sure to bring one of these articles for our use. He thinks that it will do us good ; but it is mischievous to our spirits. Blessed is he who cannot be offended in that way. It may encourage you to know that, generally, those whom God largely blesses have to go through a great fight at first, from their own brethren. Look at David. He was to bring home giant Goliath's head, but those elder brethren of his all said, "Because of the pride and the naughtiness of thy heart, to see the battle art thou come." They recommended him to stop at home with his sheep, even as they told us to keep clear of a pulpit : but God did not mean that he should remain hidden. If the Lord means to bless you, some of his very dear people will be for putting you back among the sheep again ; but do not be scandalized at Christ on that account. Stand firm as you have done. Press forward ; be not disgusted or discouraged, but, on the contrary, recollect that opposition is very often the sign of coming success. Press forward, for "Blessed is he that is not offended in me."

Moreover, many young Christians are greatly staggered by *the ill conduct of professors*. I think that there is no worse trial to a babe in Christ than to see elderly Christians walking inconsistently, and living in a lukewarm state, and even speaking as if they were antagonistic to all earnest attempts to spread the kingdom of Christ. If you are one of God's children you will not die at their hands, any more than Joseph at the hands of his brethren. If the Lord has indeed quickened you with spiritual life you will press on and work for the Master and not be ashamed.

It has frequently occurred to me to deplore that some professors fall back *through trials of providence*. We occasionally miss members of the church because they were pretty well-to-do when they joined with us, but things have gone badly with them, and they feel as if they could not show themselves. They will even say that they have not got clothes fit to come in. I have often told you that any clothes are fit to come in as long as you have paid for them ; clothing, be it fine or threadbare, is nothing to me. As far as I am concerned, I really do not know what people wear. It never strikes my eye ; I am too busy looking at your faces, when I can see you, to look at what you may happen to wear. Come, oh come, to the house of God, my suffering brother. Never let the devil prevail upon you to stop away. If your shoe leaks, if there is a hole in the elbow of your coat, the Lord does not look at that, nor do we. You come along. We shall be glad to see you, the most of us ; and if there are some who will not be glad, they are nobodies : do not take any notice of them. But never stay away from the house of God because of your shabbiness ; what can it matter ? When you begin to get low in circumstances do not be proud and say, "I can't dress as I once did, or make such a dash as I did, and so I shall not go." Why you are just the same person : a man is a man notwithstanding the little or the much which he possesses ; and when earthly comforts are going you ought to seek heavenly comforts all the more, and the poorer you get

in substance the richer you ought to seek to be in grace. "The poor have the gospel preached unto them." But I know that this is a temptation. I have heard it said that in Jamaica in the negro churches, when wages are low, attendance at the means of grace begins to decline: I know that it is so, but so it ought not to be. Do not be offended with Christ. If he chooses to let you be poor, be satisfied to be poor; yea, if you get to be as low as Job who sat on a dunghill, scraping himself with a piece of an old pot, yet learn to say with the heroic patriarch, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." If he is not ashamed of me I will not be ashamed of him, or ashamed to follow, even in rags, the standard of him who hung upon the cross and triumphed there for me. "They parted his garments among them, and for his vesture did they cast lots." I cannot be worse clad than he. Be not ashamed of him then.

III. The last head is to be, that THERE ARE SOME WHO ARE NOT OFFENDED IN CHRIST, AND THEY ARE DECLARED TO BE BLESSED. They are so because if God had not blessed them they would not be found clinging to their Lord, but would have gone back like others.

Apart from anything else it is a blessed thing to have grace enough given you to hold fast to Christ under all circumstances. If you were not one of those whom he has chosen from before the foundations of the world, if you were not one of those whom Christ specially redeemed with blood, if you were not one of those in whom the Holy Spirit has placed a new heart and a right spirit, you would go back. But if you hold out to the end, you have in that the evidence that the Lord has loved you with an everlasting love. Oh, you that are on and off with Jesus, what a poor hope yours must be. You that can run with the hare and hold with the hounds, you that try to serve God and Mammon,—you have no marks of being God's children. But those of you who put your foot down for Christ, and cannot be moved; you who have said unto your souls, "By his grace, I will not depart from following the Lord;"—you have, in that very fact, the evidence of being blessed.

And then you shall find *a blessedness growing out of your fidelity.* I believe that persecuted ones have more blessedness than any other saints. There were never such sweet revelations of the love of Christ in Scotland as when the Covenanters met in the mosses and on the hill side. No sermons ever seemed to be so sweet as those which were preached when Claverhouse's dragoons were out and the minister read his text by the lightning's flash. The saints never sang so sweetly as when they let loose those wild bird notes among the heather. The flock of slaughter, the people of God that were hunted down by the foe, these were they who saw the Lord. I warrant you that in Lambeth Palace there were happier hearts in the Lollards' dungeon than there were in the archbishop's hall. Down there where men have lain to rot, as did Bunyan in Bedford jail, there have been more dreams of heaven, and more visions of celestial things, than in the courts of princes. The Lord Jesus loves to reveal himself to those of his saints who dare take the bleak side of the hill with him. If you are willing to follow him when the wind blows in your teeth, and

the snow flakes come thickly till you are almost blinded, and if you can say,

“Through floods and flames, if Jesus lead,
I'll follow where he goes,”

you shall have such unveilings of his love to your soul as shall make you forget the sneers of men and the sufferings of the flesh. God shall make you triumphant in all places. You know this already by experience, do you not? You that are his people must know that whenever you have had to suffer for Christ it has been a blessed thing for you. Whenever anybody jeered at you, and you have felt it for the time, yet, if you have been able to bear it well, it has brought many a sweet reflection afterwards. Somebody pushed good Mr. Kilpin into the gutter and slapped him on the face at the same time, and said, “Take that, John Bunyan”; whereupon the good man took off his hat and said, “I would take fifty times as much as that to have the honour to be called John Bunyan.” Learn to look upon insults for Christ in the same light, and when they call you by an ill name do you reply, “I could bear a thousand times as much as that for the pleasure of being associated with Christ in the world's derision.”

But what blessedness awaits you if you are not offended in Jesus. You are blessed while you are waiting for him, but your best reward is to come. In that hereafter, when the morning breaks on the everlasting shore, how will they be ashamed and disgusted with themselves who sought their own honour and esteem, and denied their Lord and Master! Where will Demas be then, who chose the present world and forsook his Lord? Where will that son of perdition be who chose the thirty pieces of silver and sold the Prince of Life? What shame will seize upon the coward, the fearful, the unbelieving, the people who checked conscience and stifled conviction because a fool's laugh was too much for them! Then they will have to bear the Saviour's scorn and the everlasting contempt of all holy beings. But the men who stood meekly forward to confess their Lord,—who were willing to be set in the pillory of scorn for Christ, ready to be spit upon for him, ready to be called ill names for his sake, ready to lose their character, their substance, their liberty, and their lives for him—oh how calmly will they await the great assize, when loyalty shall receive honour from the great King. How bright will be their faces when he that sitteth on the throne will say, “They confessed me before men, and now will I confess them before my Father which is in heaven. These are mine, my Father,” says he: “they are mine. They clave unto me, and now I own them as my jewels.” These are they that followed the Lamb whithersoever he went. They read the word, and what they found there they believed. They saw their Lord's will in the Scriptures, and they laboured to do it. They were faithful to conscience and to conviction, and the Spirit dwelt in them and guided their lives; they shall be the Redeemer's crown and the beloved of his Father. They were the poor of this world; they were considered to be mere idiots by some, and were thought to have gone mad by others; but they are the Lord's own elect. Jesus will say, “They were with me in my tribulation; they were with me in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, and now they are mine,

and they shall be with me on my throne. Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundations of the world."

Oh, you are happy, you people of God who lose good situations because you cannot do dishonest things, you who cannot break the Sabbath, and therefore shut the shop up and lose a large part of your incomes, you who for Christ's sake dare to be singular and are not ashamed to be called "puritanical," and to be pointed out as hypocrites, you who bravely refuse to indulge in the intoxicating cup and utterly turn aside from evil companions, you who will not be found in the haunts of vice which men call pleasure; you who though you may think a thing to be lawful will, nevertheless, deny yourselves because it is not expedient, and will avoid the appearance of evil, you who try to put your feet down in the footprints of Christ, and follow him in all things,—you are and shall be truly blessed. With all your faults and imperfections which you mourn over, your Lord is not ashamed of you, and he will confess you at the last.

Oh, may you all be true adherents of Jesus. I set up a standard to-night and try to act as recruiting officer. Who will be enlisted into the army of Christ to-night? Is any young man ready to say "I will"? Yes, but count the cost. Are you prepared to be ridiculed? Are you prepared to suffer? Are you willing to put up with the hatred of your own family sooner than forsake God and his Christ and the truth? We will not have you else. Christ will not own you else. It must be a thorough coming out. "Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters." Who is on the Lord's side?—Who? Let your hearts answer, for there shall come a day when that same word shall thunder over all the earth, "Who is on the Lord's side? Who?" Many then will rue the day in which they were ashamed to confess a persecuted Christ. May we be on his side to-night, first trusting him, relying upon him alone for salvation, and then surrendering ourselves to him to be his for ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew x. 16—42,
and xi. 1—6.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—671, 666.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Am I my brother's keeper?"—Genesis iv. 9.

To what a shameful pitch of presumptuous impudence had Cain arrived when he could thus insult the Lord God. If it had not been on record in the page of inspiration, we might almost have doubted whether a man could speak so impudently when actually conscious that God himself was addressing him. Men blaspheme frightfully, but it is usually because they forget God, and ignore his presence; but Cain was conscious that God was speaking to him. He heard him say, "Where is Abel thy brother?" and yet he dared, with the coolest impertinence, to reply to God, "I know not. Am I my brother's keeper?" As much as to say—"Do you think that I have to keep him as he keeps his sheep? Am I also a shepherd as he was, and am I to take as much care of him as he did of a lame lamb?"

The cool impudence of Cain is an indication of the state of heart which led up to his murdering his brother; and it was also a part of the result of his having committed that terrible crime. He would not have proceeded to the cruel deed of bloodshed if he had not first cast off the fear of God and been ready to defy his Maker. Having committed murder, the hardening influence of sin upon Cain's mind must have been intense, and so at last he was able to speak out to God's face what he felt within his heart, and to say, "Am I my brother's keeper?" This goes a long way to explain what has puzzled some persons, namely, the wonderful calmness with which great criminals will appear in the dock. I remember to have heard it said of one who had undoubtedly committed a very foul murder, that he looked like an innocent man. He stood up before his accusers as calmly and quietly, they said, as an innocent man could do. I remember feeling at the time that an innocent man would probably not have been calm. The distress of mind occasioned to an innocent man by being under such a charge would

have prevented his having the coolness which was displayed by the guilty individual. Instead of its being any evidence of innocence that a man wears a brazen front when charged with a great crime, it should by wise men be considered to be evidence against him. Well may he seem dispassionate and unmoved who has already been so unfeeling as to dip his hand in blood. If he was so hardened as to do the deed, it is not likely he will display much softness when the deed is brought home to him. Oh, dear friends, let us shun sin, if it were only for the evil effect which it has upon our minds. It is poison to the heart. It stultifies the conscience, drugs it, sends it to sleep; it intoxicates the judgment, and puts all the faculties as it were into a state of drunkenness, so that we become capable of a monstrous bravery, and a blind impertinence, which makes us mad enough to dare insult God to his face. Save us, O God, from having our hearts hammered to the hardness of steel by sin; and daily keep us by thy grace sensible and tender before thee, trembling at thy word.

Now, let us note here that while we are thus heavily censuring Cain we must mind that we are not guilty ourselves; because, if we look at it without prejudice, every kind of excuse that we make to God is a very high piece of presumption. When we are charged with any form of guilt, if we begin denying or extenuating, we are guilty of the sin of Cain as to impudence before God; and when there is any duty to be performed, and we begin to shirk it, or try to make an apology for disobedience, are we not forgetting in whose presence we stand? Does he charge me with what I have committed, and shall I be so wicked as to attempt a denial? Does he bid me perform a duty, and do I begin to hesitate, question, and ask myself, "Shall I or shall I not?" Oh, bold rebellion! The essence of treason lurks in every hesitancy to obey, and dwells in every attempt to extenuate our fault when we have already disobeyed. You think Cain a monster, that he should dare to face it out with God; yet God is everywhere present, and every sin is perpetrated while he is looking on. Against him do we sin, and in his presence we do evil; and when we begin to apologise for wrong done, or hesitate concerning duty commanding, we are disobeying in the immediate presence of the Lord our God. Since we have, doubtless, been thus guilty, let us humbly confess it and ask the Lord to give us great tenderness of conscience that henceforth we may fear the Lord, and never dare to stand up to question what he has to say.

The very same thing, no doubt, lies at the bottom of objections to Bible truths. There are some who do not go to Scripture to take out of it what is there, but seeing what is clearly revealed, they then begin to question and judge and come to conclusions according to their notions of what ought to have been there. Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God? If he says it, *it is so*. Believe it. Canst thou not understand it? Who art thou that thou shouldst understand? Canst thou hold the sea in the hollow of thy hand, or grasp the winds in thy fist? Worm of the dust, the infinite must ever be beyond thee! There must always be about the glorious Lord somewhat that is incomprehensible, and it is not for thee to doubt because thou canst not understand, but rather humbly to bow before his awful presence who has made thee, and in whose hand thy breath is. God save us from

the presumption which dares to say with Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?" and from the profane arrogance which replies to the Lord in the spirit of Cain.

Now, let us look quietly at what Cain said. He said to the Lord, "Am I my brother's keeper?" May the Holy Spirit guide us in considering this question.

I. First it is to be noted that MAN IS NOT HIS BROTHER'S KEEPER IN SOME SENSES. There is some little weight in what Cain says. Generally some amount of truth clings to every lie; and even in the greatest possible profanity there is, usually, something or other of truth, though it is grievously twisted and distorted. In this atrocious question of Cain there is some little measure of reason. In some senses no man is his brother's keeper.

For instance, first, *every man must bear his own responsibility for his own acts before Almighty God.* It is not possible for a man to shift from his own shoulders to those of another his obligations to the Most High. Obedience to the law of God must be personally rendered, or a man becomes guilty. No matter how holy his father, or how righteous his mother, he himself will have to stand upon his own feet and answer for himself before the judgment-seat of God. Each man who hears the gospel is responsible for the hearing of it. No one else can believe the gospel for him, or repent for him, or be born again for him, or become a Christian for him. He must himself personally repent of sin, personally believe in Jesus Christ, personally be converted, and personally live to the service and glory of God. Every tub must stand on its own bottom. There have been idle attempts to shift the responsibility to a certain order of men called priests, or clergymen, or ministers, according as the case may be; but it cannot be done. Each man must seek the Lord himself—himself lay his load of sin at the foot of the cross, and himself accept a personal Saviour for himself. You cannot do with the matters of your soul as you do with the business of your estate, and employ a priest in the same way as you engage a solicitor to represent you. There is one substitute and advocate who can plead for us, but no earthly sponsor can avail with heaven. God demands the heart, and with the heart man must believe unto righteousness, and with his own heart, too, for none can take his place. Personal service is required by the great King, and must be rendered on pain of eternal destruction. No man can be his brother's keeper in the sense of taking upon himself another man's responsibilities.

And again, *no one can positively secure the salvation of another*, nay, he cannot even have a hope of the salvation of his friend, so long as that other remains unbelieving. O unconverted people, we can pray for you, we can ask the Lord to renew you by his Spirit, but we can do nothing with you ourselves, neither will our prayers be answered until you yourselves make a confession of your sin, and fly to Christ for salvation. It is, no doubt, a very great blessing to have friends who bear your names upon their hearts before God, but, oh, do not have any confidence in other people's prayers while you are prayerless yourselves. We ought to be very thankful that other people can pray believingly for us, but we shall never be saved if we remain unbelieving ourselves. Now, since we cannot convert other people, we are not responsible to do

what we cannot do, and hence we are not our brother's keeper so fully as to be responsible for his acceptance or reception of Jesus.

And here let me say, in the next place, that *those do very wrongly who enter into any vows or promises for others in this matter*, when they are quite powerless. To me it always remains a riddle, which I cannot explain except by the utter heartlessness and godlessness of this age, that men and women are to be found to come forward to solemnly promise concerning a little child, as yet unconscious, that it shall keep all God's holy commandments and walk in the same all the days of its life, and shall renounce all the pomps and vanities of this present evil world. I dare not stop short of saying that you lie most frightfully if you make any such promise. You go farther than that: you are guilty of perjury before almighty God. With what wrath he must look down upon persons who in an edifice, which they think to be sacred to his honour, in the presence of those who wear vestments which are supposed to mark them out as peculiarly the messengers of God, dare to say that they will do that which is quite out of their power. You cannot do it, and you know it. You have, perhaps, not renounced the pomps and vanities of the world for yourselves; certainly you have not kept all God's holy commandments. How then can you do it for another? If you stood up there, and promised before God that the child should grow eight feet high, that its hair should be of a yellow colour, and that its eyes should be green, you would be quite as much justified in making such a vow as in promising that which is prescribed in the Prayer Book, only there would be a touch of the ludicrous about that; but in this there is nothing that I can see to smile about, but everything to mourn over. It is sad that the human mind should be capable of such a use of words that it should dare to pronounce a lie as an act of worship, and then go calmly and quietly home as though everything had been done to please God. No, ye cannot be other people's keepers. Do not, therefore, put yourselves into the awful position of promising that you will be.

It is proper here to say that the most earnest minister of Christ must not so push the idea of his own personal responsibility to such an extreme as to make himself unfit for his work through a morbid view of his position. If he has faithfully preached the gospel, and his message is rejected, let him persevere in hope and not condemn himself. I remember years ago, when I laboured to feel the responsibility of men's souls upon me, I became very depressed in spirit, and the temptation arose out of it to give up the work in despair. I believe that responsibility should be duly felt, neither do I wish to say a word to excuse any who are unfaithful; but in my own case I saw that I could harp on one chord of my nature till I destroyed my power to do good, for I became so unhappy that the elasticity of my spirit departed from me. Then I recollected that if I had put the gospel faithfully before you and pressed it upon you, if you refused it I had nothing more to do with the matter except to pray over it: if I earnestly entreated the Lord to send a blessing, and tried again and again to plead and urge with your consciences that you would be reconciled to God, and if still I failed, I remembered that I should not be held responsible for not doing what I could not do, namely, turn hearts of stone to flesh and quicken dead

sinners into life. Our responsibility is heavy enough without our exaggerating it; we are not men's sponsors, and if they reject our Saviour whom we faithfully preach their blood must be upon their own heads. Our Lord did not always weep over Jerusalem, he sometimes rejoiced in spirit: no one thought must exclusively occupy our minds or we shall be good for nothing in practical life. We are not the keepers of other men's souls in a boundless sense, there is a limit to our responsibility and it is foolish to allow an excessive sensitiveness to burden us into semi-lunacy.

There is, however, a sense in which we are our brother's keeper, and of that I am now going to speak. You will bear my caveat in mind, and it will not weaken the force of what I say, but it will increase its weight, because you will feel that I have looked at the subject all round.

II. So now, secondly, IN A HIGH DEGREE WE ARE, EACH ONE OF US, OUR BROTHER'S KEEPER. We ought to regard ourselves in that light, and it is a Cainish spirit which prompts us to think otherwise and to wrap ourselves up in hardheartedness and say, "It is no concern of mine how others fare. Am I my brother's keeper?" Far from that spirit let us be.

For, first, *common feelings of humanity should lead every Christian man to feel an interest in the soul of every unsaved man.* I say, "common humanity," for we use the word "humanity" to signify kindness. Such a man, we say, has no human feeling. I am not quite certain whether human feeling is always so humane as the words would seem to imply. Humanity over yonder there, at any rate, in Russia and Turkey, does not seem to be a flower worth cultivating, but we might pray to be delivered from such humanity. The most horrible beast in those regions appears to be a man. Humanity in Bulgaria! God save us from such humanity. Yet still I trust among us the expression may be used that common humanity leads us to desire the salvation of others. I am sure, my dear friends, if you saw a man perishing for lack of bread, you would wish to share your crust with him. Will you let souls perish for lack of the bread of life without pitying and helping them? If we saw a poor wretch shivering in the winter's cold we should be ready to divide our raiment that we might clothe him. Shall we see sinners without the robe of righteousness and not be anxious to speak to them of him who can clothe them in fair white linen? When a person is in jeopardy through accident, we rush anywhere and use every exertion if by any means we may rescue him; and yet this life is trivial compared with life eternal, and for us to be indifferent when men are perishing,—indifferent to the dreadful woes which come upon impenitent sinners throughout eternity, is to act as if all brotherly compassion had fled our bosoms. Christians, I charge you, even upon so low a motive as this, because ye are men, and men are all your brothers, born of the same stock, and dwelling beneath the arched roof of the one eternal Father, therefore care for the souls of others and be, each one of you, his brother's keeper.

A second argument is drawn from the fact that *we have all of us, especially those of us who are Christians, the power to do good to others.* We have not all the same ability, for we have not all the same gifts, or the same position, but as the little maid that waited on Naaman's wife had opportunity to tell of the prophet who could heal her master, so

there is not a young Christian here but what has some power to do good to others. Converted children can lisp the name of Jesus to their sires and bless them. We have all some capacity for doing good. Now, take it as an axiom that power to do good involves the duty of doing good. Wherever you are placed, if you can bless a man, you are bound to do it. To have the power and not to use it is a sin. In withholding your hand from that which you are able to do for the good of your fellow-man you have broken the law of love. You do not want a special call to tell a sinner about Jesus. You want no special call to take a little child and tell it of the Saviour's love. You want no revelation by angels from heaven to tell you that what has benefited yourself will benefit your fellow men. All your knowledge, all your experience, all that you possess that grace has given you, demands a return in the form of service rendered to others. The Jews were God's elect nation,—elect to keep the oracles of God for all the nations; but they failed because they never cared for the bearing of those great truths upon the Gentiles, but fancied that they had received them for their own especial benefit. The selfish spirit so grew upon them that when God's grace to the heathen was mentioned it made them mad with rage. And, you saved ones, you owe much to God, but do not think that you are saved for your own especial benefit alone. It is a great benefit to you, but grace is bestowed upon you like light, that you may give it to others who are in darkness; bestowed upon you as the bread that was given by our Lord to his disciples in the desert, that they might break it among the multitude, that all might eat and be filled. Do think of this—that the power to do good involves the responsibility to do it wherever that power exists; and so, as far as you have any ability, you are by that very fact constituted your brother's keeper.

Another argument is very plainly drawn from *our Lord's version of the moral law*. What is the second and great commandment according to him? "*Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*" Now since we have loved ourselves so well that through God's grace we have sought and found forgiveness of our sin, should we not love our neighbour so well as to desire him to know his sin and to seek forgiveness too? It was right of us to secure our highest interests by laying hold upon eternal life; but if we are to love our neighbour as ourselves, should we give ourselves any rest while multitudes are despising Christ and refusing salvation? Nay, brethren, we have never come up to the standard yet; but in proportion as we do begin to love our neighbour as ourselves we shall certainly feel that God has made us in a measure to be our brother's keeper.

Yet again, *without looking to other men's souls we cannot keep the first of the two great commands* in which our Lord has summarised the moral law. It runs thus: "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength*"; but this we cannot possibly do unless we have a love towards our brother's soul, for well does the apostle ask—"If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" It is all very fine to stand up and sing about your love to God and let the missionary box go by while your eyes are gazing into heaven, but if you do not care for the heathens'

souls, how care you for God after all? It is all very pretty to be enamoured of Christ and to have a sweet experience, or to think you have, and yet poor wretches in London are dying without the knowledge of the Saviour, and you can let them die and let them sink into hell without emotion. May God save us from such piety. It is very pretty to look at, like the gilt on the gingerbread in the old fairs, but there is no gold about it at all. A loveless religion is good for nothing. He who does not love his fellow-man enough to desire his salvation, and aim at it with all his might, gives no proof that he loves God at all. Think of these things, and weigh my arguments with candour.

Once more. To the Christian man perhaps the most forcible reason will be that *the whole example of Jesus Christ, whom we call Master and Lord, lies in the direction of our being the keeper of our brother*; for what was Jesus' life but entire unselfishness? What was said of him at his death but that "he saved others: himself he could not save"? The very fact that there is a Christ at all means that there was one who cared for others, and that our Lord became a man means that he loved his enemies and came here to rescue those who rebelled against his authority. If we are selfish—if we make our own going to heaven to be the one end of life, we are not Christians. We may call whom we please Master, but we are not following Jesus Christ. Tears do you shed? But do you weep over Jerusalem? Tears for yourselves are poor things if there are never any for others. You pray and agonize: but is your grief ever caused by bearing the burden of other men's souls? Otherwise, are you like to him with whose name Gethsemane must ever be connected in our memories? Oh, though we gave our bodies to be burned, yet if we had not love for mankind it would profit us nothing. We may go a long way, and apparently all the way, in the externals of the Christian religion, but if the heart is never warm with a desire to benefit mankind, we are still aliens to the commonwealth of which Jesus is the great head. I am sure it is so. I speak not my own mind, but the mind of Christ. If he were here what would he say to any one who called himself his disciple and yet never lifted his hand or moved his tongue to snatch the firebrand from the flame or save the sinner from the error of his ways? It must be so, then: we must be our brothers' keepers.

Let the thought next rise in our minds that we are certainly ordained to the office of brother-keeper because *we shall be called to account about it*. Cain was called to account. "Where is Abel thy brother?" I would to God, dear friends, and especially you, the young men of the College, who asked me to speak about missions to-night, that you could now hear the Lord speaking to you and saying, "Where is Abel thy brother?"

Take first those who are united to us by the ties of the flesh, who come under the term, "brethren," because they are born of the same parents, or are *near of kin*. Where is John? Where is Thomas? Where is Henry, thy brother? Unsaved? Without God? What have you ever done for him? How much have you prayed for him? How often have you spoken to him seriously about his state? What means have you used for his instruction, persuasion, conviction? Dear sisters, I must not let you off. Where is your brother? You sisters have very

great power over brothers, more power than brothers have. Where, dear mother—let me put the question very tenderly to you—where is your child, your son, your daughter? Not all that you could wish, you say. But can you say if your dear child were to perish that you are clear of his blood? Father, the boy grieves you; are you quite clear that you did not help to sow in him the sins which are now your trial? Come, have you done all that should be done? If in a week's time you had to follow in mournful procession your son's body to the grave, are you quite clear? Quite clear? Relatives, I put you all together, are you quite clear of the blood of relatives? for the day will come when the question will have to be put very plainly, "Where is Abel thy brother?" You cannot help it, I know, that such a one lives in sin, and has become an unbeliever or a scapegrace. You cannot absolutely help it, but still have you done all that you should have done towards the preventing of the sin by leading that soul into the way of life and peace? I pause for a moment to let that solemn enquiry go home to every one. The proverb says, "Charity must begin at home," and certainly Christian love ought to begin there. Are our own houses swept? Our own children, and servants, and brethren, and sisters—have we as much as lieth in us sought to win them unto Christ? For my part, I deprecate the spirit which takes a Christian mother from her children to be doing good everywhere except at home. I dread the zeal of those who can run to many services but whose households are not cared for; yet sometimes such is the case. I have known people very interested in the seven trumpets and the seven seals who have not been quite so particular about the seven dear children that God has entrusted to them. Leave somebody else to open up the Revelation, and look you to your own boys. Mind where they are in the evenings! And see to your girls, that they know, at least, the gospel; for indeed there are some households where there is ignorance of the plan of salvation, albeit that the parents are professedly Christians. Such things ought not to be. Where is Abel thy brother? Thy son? Where is thy daughter, thy sister, thy father, thy cousin? See to this, that ye begin at once earnestly seeking the salvation of relatives.

But, beloved, we must never end there, because brotherhood extends to *all ranks, races, and conditions*; and according to each man's ability he will be held responsible about the souls of others whom he never saw. Where is Abel thy brother? Down in a back street in London. He is just going into the public-house. He is half drunk already. Have you done anything, friend, towards the reclaiming of the drunkard? Where is your sister? Your sister who frequents the midnight streets? You shrink back and say, "She is no sister of mine." Ay, but God may require her blood at your hands, if you thus leave her to perish. Have you ever done anything towards reclaiming her? She has a tender heart despite her sin. Alas, many a Christian woman, many a Christian man who comes across the path of such will draw themselves up with a kind of Pharisaism, shake the dust off their feet, and feel as if they were contaminated by their very presence. Yet Christians ought to love the erring and the sinful, and if we do not we shall be called to account for it. If we have an opportunity of doing good, even to the vilest, and do not use it, we shall not be guiltless. Some of

you who get rich in London go and live out in the suburbs directly, and I cannot blame you. Why should you not? But if you leave the heart of London, where the working people are, without any means of grace—if you are content to hear the gospel yourselves and withdraw your wealth from struggling churches among the poor, God will one day say to you, “Where is Abel thy brother?” City merchant, where are the poor men that earned your wealth? Where are they, who after all were the bone and sinew that made you rich, from whom you fled as though they were smitten with the plague, and whom you left to die in utter ignorance? Oh, see to this, ye rich men, ye persons in responsible positions, lest the blood of the poor of London be demanded of your souls at the great day of account. Ay, but London is not everywhere, nor is this little isle of England everything. Look if you can across sea and land to India, where your fellow subjects live, and, alas, die at this hour of famine. The day will come when God will say to English Christians, “Where is the Hindoo your brother? Where is the Brahmin your brother? Where is the Soodra your brother?” And what answer will be given by the men who ought to be there and have the ability to be there? What answer will be given by rich men who ought to help to send missionaries there, but suffer the millions to perish without a knowledge of Christ, not lifting their hand to help? And further still lies China. That does not bear thinking of, with its teeming millions—millions who have never even heard the sound of Jesus’ name. Their destiny we leave with God, but still we know that to be ignorant of God and of his Christ is a frightful thing; and every man who has light, unless his duty lies at home, should gird up his loins and say in God’s name, “I will not have the blood of India streaming down my gory skirts, nor the blood of China pouring a curse upon my head.” The Lord grant to all Christians to see their relation to mankind, and to act a brother’s part to all races.

One thing more upon this calling to account. *The more needy, the more destitute people are, the greater is their claim upon us*; for according to the account book—need I turn to the chapter? I think you recollect it—they are the persons for whom we shall have mainly to give an account: “I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was sick and in prison, and ye visited me not; naked, and ye clothed me not.” These objects of charity were the most destitute and poor of all, and the great question at the last day is about what was done *for them*. So if there be a nation more ignorant than another, our call is there first; and if there be a people more sunken and degraded than others, it is concerning them that we shall have to give a special account.

Now, I close this second head about our really being our brother’s keeper by saying this—that there are some of us who are our brother’s keeper voluntarily, but yet most solemnly, by the office that we hold. We are ministers. O brother ministers, we are our brother’s keepers. “If the watchman warn them not they shall perish.” That is an awful sentence to me—“They shall perish.” The next is not so awful sometimes to my heart, but it is very dreadful—“But their blood will I require at the watchman’s hands.” You cannot enter the Christian ministry without standing where you will want almighty grace to keep you

clear of the blood of souls. Yes, and you Sunday-school teachers, when you undertake to teach that class of children, you enter under the most solemn responsibilities. I may add that all of you who name the name of Jesus, by that very fact come into your measure of responsibility; for Christ has said, not of ministers, nor of Sunday-school teachers only, but of all, "Ye are the light of the world." If ye give no light what shall be said of you? "Ye are the salt of the earth"; and if there is no savour in you what will become of you but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men?

III. My time quite fails me. I wanted much more, but if I leave those thoughts with you I shall be well content. However, I must occupy a little longer space while I speak awhile on the third head, namely, that IT WILL BE HIGH PRESUMPTION ON OUR PART IF, FROM THIS NIGHT FORWARD, WE SHIRK THE DUTY OF BEING OUR BROTHER'S KEEPER.

I will set it very briefly in a strong light. It will be denying the right of God to make a law, and to call upon us to obey it, if we refuse to do as we are bidden. God has so organized society that every man receiving light is bound to spread it, and if you decline the blessed service you will practically deny the right of God to require such service of you. You will be judging your Judge, and godding it over your God. High treason lies in that.

Notice, next, that you will be denying all claim on your part to the divine mercy; because if you will not render mercy to others, and if you deny altogether your responsibility to others, you put yourself into the position of saying, "I want nothing from another"—consequently, nothing from God. Such mercy as you show, such mercy shall you have. The question is not what will become of the heathen if you do not teach them; the great question is what will become of *you* if you do not do it? If you let sinners die, what will become of *you*? There is the point. You put yourself out of the reach of mercy, because you yourself refuse to render it. When you bow your knee in prayer you curse yourself, for you ask God to forgive your debts as you forgive your debtors, and thus in effect you ask him to deal with you as you are dealing with others. What mercy, then, can you expect?

Indeed, there is this about it too—that your act is something like throwing the blame of your own sin upon God if you leave men to perish. When Cain said, "Am I my brother's keeper?" he meant, probably, "You are the preserver of men. Why did you not preserve Abel? I am not his keeper." Some throw on the sovereignty of God the weight which lies on their own indolence. If one soul perishes without being taught the gospel, you cannot fling the weight of that fact upon divine sovereignty until the Christian church has done her utmost to make the gospel known. If we had all done all that could be done—I mean all of us who are believers—and yet souls perished, the blame would lie with men themselves; but wherein we fall short, to that degree we are our brother's keeper, and we must not accuse the Lord.

And again, there is to my mind an utter ignoring of the whole plan of salvation in that man who says, "I am not going to have any responsibility about others," because the whole plan of salvation is based on substitution, on the care of another for us, on the sacrifice of another for

us; and the whole spirit of it is self-sacrifice and love to others. If you say, "I will not love"—well, the whole system goes together and you renounce it all. If you will not love, you cannot have love's benediction. If you will not love you cannot be saved by love; and if you fancy that the Christian faith leaves you unloving and selfish and yet takes you to heaven, you have made a mistake. There is no such religion propagated by the word of God, for the religion of Jesus teaches that since Christ has so loved us we are henceforth to love one another, and to love the ungodly so as to endeavour to bring them to the feet of the Saviour. God grant that these words may have a salutary effect by the Spirit of God applying them to your souls.

Last of all, it may turn out—it *may* turn out—that if we are not our brother's keeper we may be our brother's murderer. Have any of us been so already? When were you converted? Will you kindly look back to your sins before conversion? He must be a very happy man who did not before conversion commit sins which injured others; and there are some persons whose lives before they turned to Christ were frightfully blended with the career of others whom they have left in the gall of bitterness to perish. I have seen bitter tears shed by men who have been of ill lives when they have recollected others with whom they sinned. "I am forgiven: I am saved," one has said to me. "But what about that poor girl? Ah me! Ah me!" One man has been an infidel and he has led others into infidelity, and he has been saved himself but he cannot bring those back again whom he tutored in atheism. Before conversion you may have committed many a soul-murder. Ought not this to stir you up to seek now, if possible, as much as lies in you, to bring those to Christ whom once you led away, and to teach the living word since once you taught the deadly word which ruined souls? Much solemn thought ought to arise out of this. Pray for the power of the Holy Ghost to work by you to the salvation of those whom your evil influence drew towards the pit.

But what shall be said of our conduct since we have been converted? May we not have helped to murder souls since then? I tell you a cold-hearted Christian makes worldlings think that Christianity is a lie. Inconsistent Christians—and there are such—woe, woe that it should be so!—bad-tempered, covetous people, cross-grained, sardonic, snarling persons, who we hope may be the Lord's people, what shall we say of these? How little they are like their Master, they are the propagators of death. I do believe that nobody is more mischievous than a professor who is barely a Christian, or almost a Christian, and continually shows his ill side to the world while yet he boasts of his piety. He disgusts the world with the name of Jesus. Perhaps some of you have backslidden since your conversion and you have committed acts which have made the enemy to blaspheme the name of Christ. I charge you by the love of God repent of this iniquity. Look at what you have done. Look at how you have led others astray. Oh see to it at once. You know that when David had sinned with Bathsheba he repented and was forgiven, but he could never make poor murdered Uriah again live. He was dead. You may have gone astray and damaged a soul eternally, but you cannot undo the deed. Still, if you cannot revive the slain, you can mourn over the crime. Awake, arise, ye sluggish Christians,

and ask the Holy Ghost to help you to be henceforth your brother's keepers to the utmost of your power.

And do you not think that we may have been seriously injurious to others by denying them the gospel? If you want to murder a man, you need not stab him: starve him. If you want to destroy a man you need not teach him to drink or swear: keep back the gospel from him. Be in his company and never say a word for Christ. Be where you ought to speak and be sinfully silent, and who knows how much blood will be laid to your door. Do you not think that to deny a cup of cold water to a man and let him die of thirst is murder? To deny the gospel, to have no word to say for Jesus—is not this soul-murder? God accounts it so. “Well,” say some, “I could not speak or preach.” No, but do you pray for the conversion of others? Some people also have money entrusted to them: they cannot go to India or China, which I have been speaking of, but many other men are ready to go, and they ought to assist in sending them. I have men in the College ready to go, but I have no power to send them. The Missionary Society is in debt; they cannot send out all they would, and yet here are people in England with thousands of pounds that they will never want, and yet the heathen may die and be lost before they will part with their gold. Is there no crime in all this? Does not the voice of your brother's blood cry unto God from the ground? I believe it does. You are not to do what you cannot do, but what you can do; and surely there cannot be any question about such a matter as this, because if you were once to see persons in peril—if you stood on the beach, and saw a good ship breaking up, if you were able to hold an oar, you would want to be in the lifeboat. There is not a woman among you but would be willing to spare her husband for such a task, or lend her own hand to push the boat down over the shingle till it was launched upon the wave. For life—for the precious life of our fellow men—we would do anything; but if we believe, as we do, that there is a world to come and a terrible hell, and that there is no way of salvation except by Jesus Christ, we ought to feel tenfold ardour for the rescue of the souls of men from the wrath to come.

If some shall be stirred by these words, my heart will greatly rejoice; but if you are aroused do not promise to make an effort in your own strength, but pray to God about it. Commit yourself to God, and ask the divine Spirit to lead you into ways of usefulness, that ere you go hence you may have brought some souls to Jesus; and to his name shall be the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Genesis iv. 1—15;
1 John iii.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—72 (Song 1); 72 (Song 2).

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

WITH THE KING FOR HIS WORK!

(A motto for Sunday-school Teachers.)

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 1ST, 1877, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"These were the potters, and those that dwelt among plants and hedges: there they dwelt with the king for his work."—1 Chronicles iv. 23.

ALL labour is honourable. No man ever needs to be ashamed of an honest calling. Whether a potter or a gardener, or whatever else his occupation may be, the workman need never blush at the craft or toil by which he earns his honest wage. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," belongs to us all. The sluggard may well be ashamed of his sloth, not the diligent man of his industry. It is quite certain that the word of God does not disparage the humblest calling. I suppose that there is scarcely a trade or occupation which is not mentioned in sacred Scripture. The rough hand and the rugged face of the peasant are to be preferred before the dainty finger and the sleek form of the Pharisee. And the election of grace has comprised men of all sorts—herdsman and fisherman, brickmaker and tent maker; those who ploughed the soil, and those who ploughed the sea. From all ranks and classes and conditions of men God has been pleased to call forth his own; and he has loved them none the less because they have had to soil their hands with the potter's clay, or bend their backs to till the field. Wretched is the clown who sits in the shade while his comrades work in the sun.

There is an honour then, and a dignity, too, in humble honest toil. The Bible itself does not disdain to record the humble craftsman's name. To serve a king always was and still is deemed a thing to be desired. Those who do such duties claim some deference from their fellows. Work done well, however common, is accounted worthy of its wage, but work done for royalty generally has some special attraction to commend it. Such a man is privileged by appointment to be purveyor of this or that to her Majesty the Queen; and he takes good care to let us know it. It is published in his shop window. It is painted

No. 1,400.

over his door. It is printed on his cards. It is pointed out on his bill-heads. He is "By appointment to the Queen." Royalty seems to dignify him. But, beloved, there is a King whom it is real honour to serve—an honour which angels appreciate—which archangels delight in. That King is the King of kings, and of him we shall have to speak to-night, and of his service.

Earthly kings have many servants, and so has the King Eternal. I trust that many of us count it to be the very joy of our life that we call Jesus Christ our Lord and Master, and that to us it is the highest pleasure to serve him—to render to him all that our strength can possibly yield because we feel that we are debtors to him, and are bound, henceforth, in bonds of love to his divine service for ever and for evermore.

Looking at my text, I see three or four observations springing from it.

I. The first is this. Since we have mention here of potters and those that dwelt among the plants and hedges with the king for his work, we infer that OUR KING HAS MANY KINDS OF SERVANTS. Other kings have servants of different sorts, and it would be the extreme of folly if one royal servant should say to another, "You are a nobody. You are of no use, because you cannot perform the offices which I am called to discharge." No brother must exult over his neighbour. He that is appointed to one office must fill it, and he ought to sympathise with the friend who fulfils any other office, but he should never exalt himself above him. The king has many kinds of servants.

Look at any one of our kings, and you find that they have *soldiers*. Until the halcyon days of peace shall arrive—may God speedily send them—I suppose there will always be standing armies and regiments of soldiers. Certainly, our great King, the King of kings, has many soldiers. It is their duty to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. They have to put on the panoply of God, and to contend, not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual wickedness in high places. Full often they have to draw the sharp sword of controversy against doctrinal errors, which might come in to destroy the city of our God. Do not find fault with the Christian because he has soldierly qualities. There hath been no time since Christ went to heaven in which soldiers of Christ were not required. Until the last enemy shall have laid down his weapons, and infidelity and superstition shall be chased out of the world, we shall want these fighting men, who, with sword and shield, go forth to the conflict. They are your Master's servants. Pray for them.

But the king has his *watchmen*, too, who go not forth to fight, but stay at home and move about the city, especially by night. And do you know, I think the Lord's watchmen are mostly found amongst the sick. During the day, I suppose, there is little fear lest the incense of prayer should cease to rise up to the throne of heaven. But were we all in good health we might be all asleep, and no prayer might be ascending. From this island at a certain hour of the night, if all were locked in slumber, there would be no petitions going up; but it seems to me to be a part of heavenly ordinance that every hour shall be sanctified by prayer, as well the dead of night as the blaze of noon; and so he keeps

Some of his watchmen awake. They must pray. Their pains, their sleeplessness keep them devout. They lift up their hearts to the Most High. And so with a blessed cordon of prayer the night watches are surrounded, and the Lord does keep his flock safe from the wolf. I like to think of those who cannot come out to the assembly; and cannot take part in any of the active exercises of evangelization, who, nevertheless, can on their beds keep watch for the Lord. "Ye that make mention of the Lord keep not silence, and give him no rest until he establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." These are his remembrancers—these consumptives, these sick folk, who in the gloomy hours of night keep awake and pour out their heart like water before the Lord. Now, let not the soldier despise her that tarries at home, for she divideth the spoil. Let not Barak exult over feeble Jael who keepeth the tent, for it may be that her prayer shall drive the nail through the adversary's brow; and it shall not fall to Barak to be honoured, but unto the humble stay-at-home. Oh, watch, ye watchers. Plead much, ye intercessors. Ye are the Lord's servants. Active and passive duties are alike valuable, and God accepts them; let not one, therefore, exalt himself against the other.

There are some of my Master's servants that are his *heralds*. You know that great kings have their trumpeters to go and proclaim for them. This is an honourable office, and one to which I trust many a young man here will aspire—to be a herald of the cross to publish salvation. Get ye up to the high mountains and lift up your voice. Lift it up. Lift it up with strength. Say unto the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!"

But in every court there are *scribes* as well as heralds, the king's registrars that have to keep the chronicles and the records. So our great King has his scribes—the men of Isachar that can handle the pen, they whose hearts indite the good matter, for they speak of the things which they have made touching the king as the pen moves across the page. Well, whether it be by the spoken utterance of the tongue, or by the silent but vigorous expression of facts, thoughts, and feelings, we must be equally grateful for every opportunity to do anything for Jesus. And instead of beginning to question, "Which is the more valuable?" let each one seek to make his own department of the Master's service as complete and efficient as he can.

Our King, too, has his *musicians*, as other monarchs have, who play before them to make a goodly sound upon an instrument. And I do delight in those of my Master's servants who can dedicate musical talents to him, and give us, first of all, the sweet poetry with which we adore him in psalm and song; and after that the sweet tunes which help us with united voice to magnify the Lord. Then there are sweet voices which help us of gruffer note in some way to keep harmony, and so together to praise God. God be thanked for the brother who has the voice of melody. Let him consecrate it to his Lord, and train it, and use it always with discretion, not perhaps too loudly, and yet sometimes not too softly either.

Still in a king's house they do not all sing. They cannot. There are some that make no melody. Servants are there in the royal palace that make no music except it be with the brush and the broom; or whose

music consists of the motion of their willing feet as they wait at the table, or as they go from chamber to chamber upon the royal errand. Now, let not those who can sing his praises exalt themselves above those who can perform the lowliest service for the Lord. And let not those who are performing the real service of life think that there is something about their labour that is more acceptable than the singing of Jehovah's praise, for it is not so. Each one in his own order, all acting with the right motive, all helping to take their part in the right spirit, and all shall be equally acceptable with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Here is a great variety of servants. I cannot stop to go through them all, but you see the text mentions some of them called *potters*. I do not know but they may supply a very good emblem of Sunday-school teachers. Let them not be ashamed of the metaphor, for I cheerfully put myself with them, as I hope the minister may have some claim to be classed among the King's potters. What do the potters do but take the clay while it is yet plastic and soft to put it on the wheel and make the wheel revolve, and then with thumb and finger fashion the clay as it revolves before them, to make a vessel fit for the royal use? Well, dear Sunday-school teachers, if ever at any time the human mind is plastic it is while a child is young. We should any of us find it hard to learn who never had studious habits till we reached the age of thirty years or upward. Many a man is willing enough to be a student, but he has not the faculty for it. His skull-case has become set and hard and tight, and he cannot make his brain work as he could have done if he had begun earlier; but with the younger folk—oh what an opportunity there is to do a world with them! We cannot fashion them unless the hand of the Lord be with our hand—unless God makes their hearts soft—unless he puts them on the wheel for us, but if he does that, oh how a mother's hand can mould her boy! How a teacher's heart can mould the boy or girl committed to him or her, and how throughout life the men and women of the future will bear about them the marks of the teachers of to-day. You are the King's potters. May he help you to do the work aright.

And then there is another class of workers mentioned, and those, I think, are like Sunday-school teachers too—those that dwell among plants and hedges. These were the king's *gardeners*. They dwelt in sheltered places—in enclosures that were protected by hedges to keep off the wind and so retain the heat. They lived in pleasant retreats where rare plants could grow. Now this is just what the Sunday-school teacher should be. He tries to get the plants out from the wild waste and bring them into the

“garden walled around,
Chosen and made peculiar ground;
The little spot enclosed by grace,
Out of the world's wide wilderness.”

He knows the church is the garden of the Lord and he longs to plant many little slips in it. And I bless God that there are some teachers that my eye rests upon who have planted many little slips that have been growing well. I thanked God when I saw them first take root: I blest the Lord when it was my business to water them as it is mine now, and that of their teachers still; and I hope it will be the business of the

teacher, and the pastor too, to gather much fruit from these little plants that we dwell among, that we plant, and that we water, and that we tend. Dear friends, if you are engaged in this service, it is a right honourable one. The first man was a gardener, and the second man—the Lord from heaven—was supposed to be a gardener, and the supposition was not untrue, for never was there such a garden as he planted. It is he who makes the wilderness to rejoice and blossom as the rose. Because of his own excellency, and because of the plants that he has nurtured, the church is a garden of unparalleled renown.

Thus there are many servants of our great Master; and I will only say this much more concerning them: how blessed it is to be included in the number. Oh, one does not mind what department he takes so long as he may but serve Christ. I have often prayed by myself a prayer like this: "Lord make me the door-mat of the church. Let everybody wipe his boots upon me. Let me bear the mud and the mire so long as my Master's temple may be kept clean by me." And I think any Christian man will wish to take the lowest and most menial place so that he may be accounted of by our Lord as among "his servants who serve him." The scullions in Christ's kitchen are more honourable than the counsellors of an imperial court. They that have to do the worst and blackest work, if such there be to be done for the great Master, have a higher esteem in the judgment of perfect spirits than those that rule empires, conduct armies, but know not the fear of God.

II. I proceed to our second observation: **ALL WHO LIVE WITH OUR KING MUST WORK.** Read the text. "There were the potters and those that dwelt among plants and hedges: there they dwelt with the king for his work." They did not live on the king's bounty and dwell on the king's country estates to do nothing, but they dwelt there for his work. I do not know whether all that call my Master "Lord" have caught this idea. I have thought that some of our church members imagine that the cause of Christ was a coach, and that they were to ride on it, and that they would prefer the box seat, or else a very comfortable seat in the middle of the coach. Nor do they wish to be incommoded by too many fellow travellers: they do not like to be pressed for room even in the pews: they would rather sit at ease, solace themselves with their own dignity, and ride to heaven in a quiet, respectable, comfortable sort of way. In fact, it would appear to me as if some of our friends imagined that when a man becomes a believer he may repose on a silken couch and be carried to glory in a palanquin, never needing to do anything afterwards, but simply to dream himself into everlasting felicity. They get a nice creed that drugs their conscience; they settle down in some snug corner where they defy anybody to disturb their security; they select a sound minister who runs on one line that he never leaves; they listen sometimes, not often too earnestly, to the plan and promises of the gospel; and when they have listened they say they are fed. And if they ask about a minister, the question is, "Are you fed?" When it has got as far as the feeding their interest is exhausted. With the work of faith and the labour of love they never meddle. But let me assure you as a matter of fact that they that live with our King must work. They do not work that they may live with

him, but they work because they live with him. Because his grace has admitted them into his courts, therefore from that time they begin to work with all diligence. And why is this? What motive prompts them?

Well, first, *because he works*. Jesus said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." The most wonderful worker in the universe is God himself; and his dear Son, when he was here, never had an idle hour. "He went about doing good." He began life as a carpenter, and, I do not doubt, worked hard at it. Then as a Saviour he surveyed on the outset his great charge "to fulfil all righteousness." With untiring zeal he pursued his arduous mission to the end, and he finished his work. Until he said, "It is finished," he did not relax his ardour or lay down his toil. Brethren, we cannot dwell with the great working God and yet be sluggards. He will not put up with it. He will not have communion with us unless we are agreed with him. "How can two walk together unless they be agreed?" Are you an active-minded person, and have you had a servant that you could not stir or hasten or make her move with agility? Or have you had a workman who took one step to-day and another to-morrow? Why, it gives you the fidgets. It makes your flesh creep. You do not know what to do. You cannot bear it. You take hold of the broom, or whatever else he is pretending to handle, and turn to; for you would sooner do the work yourself. Your patience is exhausted. Now, a glorious and active-minded God will not walk with sluggards. He cannot endure them. If you are to dwell with God you must be his servant, you must have something to do in his name; in whatever occupation it may be, to lay yourself out for his glory is essential and imperative.

The next reason why those that dwell with him must work, is that *his company always inspires us with the desire to do something for him*. You never spent a happy hour alone in private prayer holding privileged communion with God when you did not feel constrained to say, "Lord, show me what thou wouldest have me to do." You never enjoyed full assurance of faith without the question coming to you, "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?" You cannot look at him on the cross bleeding, pouring out his soul unto death for us, without feeling that the couch of inglorious ease would ill befit a faithful disciple's favoured fellowship with him. You crave that your hand should find something to do, and that your tongue should have something to say. You yearn for some opportunity of sounding forth his dear praises. You may go where you will if you want to be idle, but you cannot go to the cross and come away a sluggard. The nails of it do prick us into sacred industry. They are the spurs of Christian duty. The agonies of our self-sacrificing Lord inspire us with such ardour, that we feel we must serve him, and take it as a favour, not as a tax. It is a delight rather than a duty to lay ourselves out for him.

When you get into Christ's courts, there is so much to do that *you cannot help doing something*. If you are a member of an active church you find yourself called upon this way and that way to spend and to be spent for Christ. In such a hive drones are despicable. If you live where there are young converts, where there are tried believers,

where there are backsliders, where there are hopeful penitents ;—as these come under your notice you perceive that your Master's house is full of service, and you cannot refrain from taking some share in it, and taking it eagerly, anxiously, and cheerfully.

Nay, a true Christian cannot stroll outside his Master's house without feeling calls to service. Can you walk these streets and have your ears assailed, as I grieve to say you must, with the filthiest language from working men,—who seem, to my mind, to have become more coarse in their talk the last ten years than they used to be,—can you go down a street and have your blood curdle at the frequent oath without feeling that you must be up and doing ? Can you see these streets swarming with children and not come forward to help the Sunday-school ? Can you watch the multitudes of boys and girls streaming out of the Board School and not say to yourself. "What is done with these on the Lord's day ? Others must be hard at work with them, why am I not doing something ?" Everywhere, on all hands, work is suggested, and especially by the activity of our adversaries. See how they compass sea and land to make one proselyte ! See how the devil incessantly goes about seeking whom he may devour ! He appears to have lost his eyelids. He never sleeps. He is intent continually upon devouring the souls of men ; and all the incidents and accidents we meet with say to us, "Are you Christians ? Then bestir yourselves. Are you the King's servants ? Then be up and doing, for there are ten thousand things that must be done at once, if done at all, without waiting to discuss the best way of doing them."

At any rate, of this thing you may be quite certain. The professor of true religion who is negligent in his Lord's service must and will lose the comforts of his Lord's presence. I speak not, of course, of those who are sick, infirm, or helpless, for as I have already explained, by their patience and resignation and intercession they are exercising a very important part of the work of the Lord's house, but I speak of those of you who might be actively engaged, and I regard it as a rule without exception that sluggish Christians become uncomfortable. When you meet with a brother or sister in Christ who is always grievous, complaining of doubts and fears, sighing and groaning, crying and moaning over an experience that puzzles rather than profits, you need not ask many questions, for you may safely interpret all the symptoms. That person does not teach in the Sunday-school. That person does not go out preaching in the villages. That person is very likely doing nothing. An earnest worker may be occasionally beset with temptations, but he will not be perpetually bewildered with these throes of anxiety. If that be the regular, habitual condition of the man, it looks as if he had a want of occupation. There be many flies and moths and spiders and cobwebs in the chambers of the indolent. Surely they would be brushed away if there were more activity for Christ. I think any minister will tell you it is the people who do nothing themselves in a church that find fault with those who do the work. With great discernment they can always discover flaws in the policy and practice of the earnest brethren who take the pains and do the drudge of office. Bless their hearts, why do they not do it better themselves ? No, not

they. They seem to think that their department in the sacred household is to find fault with their Master's servants. Now I have looked all over his house, for I have been for years in it, occupying an official position; I have pried over my Master's books, and I have been into his record office, but do you know I have not found anywhere that he has ever issued appointments to any ladies or gentlemen to be the supervisors and censurers of his servants. I believe they act without commission, and that they will probably go without any wages. Or if all service rendered meets with an equitable retribution, and the wages of sin is death, their carping will bring them no comfort, and their revilings will be requited with bitter remorse. O brothers and sisters, there is no colourable excuse for your culpable inactivity. Christ walks at a quick pace. If you want to walk with him you must not loiter. He is no friend to the sluggard. I cannot always tell you where fellowship with him may be found, but I can tell you where it can never be enjoyed. He is not where idlers lounge and congregate to gossip with gibe and jeer, with slur and sneer, railing at the very men whose conduct proves their conscience so pure that they would blight their own interests to bless the Lord's cause. But he is with his people who are diligently devoted to his service and seek to him for strength to do that service well. Those that live with our King must work.

III. Now, thirdly, THOSE THAT WORK FOR OUR KING OUGHT TO LIVE WITH HIM.

That is the other side of it, for these potters and these gardeners dwelt with the king for his work. I offer to the Sunday-school teachers of the south side of London a motto which may last them for life: "With the King for his work." Put that up now over your mantel-pieces. "With the King for his work." Work by all means, because you are with the King; but get with the King by all means, because you want to do his work. Oh, how important it is that every good servant of our heavenly Master should be with him. Why? Do you ask me; why? Because you cannot know his will if you do not live with him. He that lives with Christ gets his orders every day; and oftentimes from moment to moment he gets guidance from his great Lord's eye. He says, "Thou shalt guide me with thine eye." You know how a servant in the house watches her mistress. The mistress does not need always to speak. Perhaps it is at a dinner. There is a number of guests. She does not keep calling, "Mary," and instructing her in measured sentences to attend to the various requirements, but by a simple movement of her head, or a quiet glance of her eye, Mary can understand all her mistress means. Now, those that live with Jesus Christ have a sort of secret alphabet between themselves and him. Oftentimes when a Christian man does the right thing, you read as a story, or as an anecdote that enlivens a book, how strangely wise he was, how he dropped the fit word at the fitting moment, how he had a knack of giving the right answer to one who wrongly assailed him. Do you know why he had that knack? He lived with his Master, so he knew what you knew not. He knew the meaning of his Master's eye, and it guided him. Oh, I believe if Sunday-school teachers and ministers live with their Lord they will be made wise to win souls. Oftentimes things

they never thought of saying they will say exactly at the right time to the right persons, and so surprising will it be to the persons addressed that they will almost think that you must have been told about them. Keep close to your Master, and then you will know your Master's will.

Why should workers live with the Lord, but that they may gather strength? Every hour of communion with Christ is an hour of increased vigour. In the old fable when Hercules fought with the giant he could not kill him. He flung him down with all his might, and Hercules *could* fling a fellow about. He thought he had dashed him to pieces, but every time he got up stronger than before, so down he flung him again. "Surely," he thought, "if I have destroyed the hydra and the lion I can kill this man—this giant." But up the giant sprang again, because the old fable said that the earth was his mother, and every time that he fell he touched his mother and got new life from her. So every time a Christian falls on his knees, draws near to his God, he gets a touch of his great Father, and he gets new strength. When the devil throws a Christian to his knees—throws him down with such force, too, that he thinks, "I will crush him," he gets up and is stronger than the devil again. Over he goes again. He trips him up, flings him down, but every time he falls to praying he rises from before the mercy-seat like a giant against the foe. Oh, then, dwell near the Lord, for that is the source of your strength as well as your knowledge.

Why should workers dwell with the King? Surely it is thereby to keep up their enthusiasm. Humanly speaking, the very soul of Christianity is enthusiasm. Cold religion—well, there are some cold things that give one a chill to think of. Cold religion! It is the most ghastly spectacle on which a pure and fervent heart can look. Cold religion! Ugh! It is nauseous. There is only one thing worse, and that is a cool, listless profession; for Jesus Christ tells us that the lukewarm made him sick outright. To the Laodicean, said the faithful and true witness, "I would thou wert cold or hot," "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Let your faith be at furnace heat. Religion cannot long be lukewarm; it will either die out or it will kindle and set you all on fire. If it consume a man, then it only reaches the heat at which Jesus Christ lived. Somebody has very properly said, "Blood-heat is the healthy heat for a Christian's soul." So it is. But what is the blood-heat? The heat of our great atoning sacrifice—the blood-heat of our blessed Redeemer when he sweat great drops of blood, and gave himself for us. Would God we were filled with such flaming zeal. But ah! you never can attain unto it except you live with him. The world is cold and icebound, and the church is chill and pierced with the east wind. Would you get into the tropics where fruits luxuriant grow? Live near to Christ, then you will become enthusiastic, and pursue your work with a fervour all divine.

We must live with our King too, that we may be inspired with courage. I suppose some teachers are timid. I know some preachers are haunted with strange fears. The way to quicken courage is to look the King in the face. When you see how patiently he endured reproach, and how resolutely he proceeded with his ministry of love, even

to die for us, you will not be afraid of the faces of men, nor will you shrink from duty because nervous friends warn you of danger.

And you had need live with the King if you would cultivate the soft grace of patience. Sunday-school work is very trying. It often vexes the soul, and you get weary. But when you go and look at him and see how he failed not, neither was discouraged, but went through with the work which he undertook till he could say, "It is finished," you will chide your soul for all its futile excitement and feverish unrest. By your patience and perseverance you will approve yourselves as children of God and followers of Christ.

In fine, dear friend, I do not know that a person can do anything for our Lord Jesus Christ aright without living in communion with him. I am persuaded that Martha got into trouble about that dinner of hers, because she did not mix with her serving the sitting at the Saviour's feet with Mary. I am sure that we can attempt too much and accomplish too little; for we can do apparently a great deal, but because we have not had power with God, very little may come of it. Steeped seed is the best for Sunday-school teachers. It is always well to take care that the good seed you bring to the little plots—your children's little minds—has been laid in soak the night before in earnest prayer. It is wonderful how quickly it sprouts and what a deal of vitality it manifests if you put it asoak. The dry seed—dry teaching without any praying—without any communion with God—may be productive, but it is a long time in coming up and yielding a reward for your labour.

Believe me, my dear brothers and sisters, that to abide near to Jesus is the very life of Christian service. I would have you feel and speak on this wise, "I am engaged in the service of the King. Fifty little children I have under my charge—all infants—and I am trying to teach them something, but they are all full of fun, and I cannot get anything into their little heads, but it would never do to think of giving it up, because I am doing it for Jesus. I would not do it for anybody else." Or, "I have got half-a-dozen unruly boys in the ragged school. I would not undertake the work of this school for the biggest salary that could be offered me, but I can do it for Jesus Christ, and I will do it for the love and gratitude I feel to him; in fact, I am happy in doing it because I know that he is looking on—that he sees all that I do—for if nobody else appreciates my service he does, and he will accept me, and he will help me, and some blessed result will come of it, so I will tax all my energies to the task as the workman wakes up when there is a king watching. With what care and diligence he will exercise his highest skill! So let thy task be performed with all thy might, for if done for him it ought to be done well. Nothing should be slurred over in a slovenly fashion that is done for Jesus. This thought, that I am with the King is animating and helpful to *me*, I can assure you beyond any description of its influence that I can convey to you.

IV. Now to our last point, upon which only a few words. That which should reconcile us to live in any place is that we may work for the King in it; and that which should reconcile us to any work is that **WE ARE WORKING FOR THE KING**. "These were the potters that dwelt among plants and hedges: there they dwelt with the king for his work." In any place where you dwell you can dwell

with the King. These pottery men and gardeners were on the king's estate. You need not live next door a church; you need not live with a pious family to have God with you. Oh, bless the Lord, I have met with my Lord and Master by the bedsides of the sick in Kent-street, many a time. My friend Mr. McCree has met the Lord many a time in a cellar in St. Giles's; and he is often to be found in Bethnal-green and Shoreditch—in the very worst habitations that ever human beings dwelt in. Dwell wherever you may—on the land or on the sea, in the hospital or in the workhouse,—you may still dwell there with the King. He does not want any carpets. He does not care about rich furniture. In fact, he does not often come where the floors are covered with Turkey carpets. I think the scarcest place for Christ is with the rich; they seldom have much to say about him. I speak not of them all, but of very many. If for my part I want half an hour's real talk about Jesus Christ I must visit the poor man. I do not know how others find it. It is so; it is sadly so, in my experience. Well, wherever you dwell and whatever your rank, you may have the Lord dwelling with you; and this ought to reconcile you to dwell anywhere, if you can serve the Lord. I always find that when men are converted if they live in a very bad neighbourhood, they try and get out of it. That is right enough. I think if I were living in some neighbourhoods the sooner I could change my residence the better pleased I should be. At the same time, in an ill locality a good man is a great boon. Where is a bright lamp more wanted than down in a dark alley? Where is the pure light most wanted? Is not it amongst the depraved and profligate? Sometimes I almost fear that the repugnance with which Christian people fly away from a bad district is a misfortune for the population, especially for the young who are left behind. Of the sympathy that might be felt, and the good that might be done by their being there, the inhabitants are henceforth bereft. My dear brother, if you are placed in the very midst of ribald wickedness, an opportunity to serve the Lord where Satan's seat is might induce you to stop there awhile with the self-denial of a missionary among the heathen. It may be that it is cowardly and craven to run away. Rather should it become you to say, "I am put into this fort in the midst of the enemy, and I mean to keep it; my fixed purpose is to hoist the flag of Christ on the top of it, and instead of deserting the post to strive incessantly to win souls for him." At any rate, if you are compelled to live in neighbourhoods that you do not like, it ought to be some comfort to you that the King will live there with you, and that perhaps he has placed you there to try your faith, to honour his name, and to bless the outcasts. Go, beloved, wherever you reside and realize that your abode is a station you are appointed to occupy for his work. Let the nurse-girl in the family, with the little ones about her, live for Christ and lose no opportunity of letting her light shine. Let the artizan, thrown into the large workshop, where there are none like himself, account that he is put there for the King's work. The tradesman, dealing with many who like to have a word across the counter, should order his conversation for the glory of Christ. The merchant, who will be sure to make many friends in business, should

not forget his Lord, but bear a faithful testimony as often as he can. The employer of many hands should take care that he seeks the welfare of their souls, and consider by what manifold agencies he can promote the King's work. You that have leisure, dear friends, should feel that your spare time is a sacred trust, to be squandered never, but to be consecrated ever to the King's work. You that have talents should feel the like imperative obligation—yea, and especially you that have only one talent! It was the man of one talent that buried it. So it commonly is. You have not much talent you think—nothing brilliant. Then the temptation is to go and bury your bit of bronze because you cannot display any glittering gold. Your conscious weakness produces a wicked conceit. Do not withhold your mite from the treasury because you have not a million to contribute. Live still with the King for his work.

Doubtless I have been addressing some who have never served the King, who do not know him, who do not love him. I am not going to ask you to work for him. No, no. My Lord wants none to work for him who do not believe in him. "Come and trust him." Our soldier friends over there, a sprinkling of whom I am pleased to see, and proud to salute, know how to enlist in the service. How does a man first become a soldier? Well, he receives a shilling. He receives, and then he is a soldier. He that will receive Christ is made a soldier of Christ. It is receiving you have got to begin with. And after you have received Christ then you shall go forth and serve him. Put out an empty hand and receive Christ into it by a little faith, and then go and serve him, and the Lord bless you henceforth and for ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm xxxiv.

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“By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.”—Hebrews xi. 21.

“WHEN he was a dying.” Death is a thorough test of faith. Beneath the touch of the skeleton finger shams dissolve into thin air, and only truth remains; unless indeed a strong delusion has been given, and then the spectacle of a presumptuous sinner passing away in his iniquities is one which might make angels weep. It is hard, very hard, to maintain a lie in the presence of the last solemnities; the end of life is usually the close of self-deception. There is a mimic faith, a false assurance, which lasts under all ordinary heats of trial, but this evaporates when the fires of death surround it. Certain men are at peace and quiet in their conscience, they stifle convictions, they refuse to allow such a thing as self-examination, they count an honest self-suspicion to be a temptation of the devil, and boast of their unbroken tranquillity of mind, and go on from day to day with perfect confidence; but we would not be of their order. Their eyes are closed, their ears are dull of hearing, and their heart has waxen gross. A siren song for ever enchants them with delight, but also entices them to destruction. Terrible will be their awakening when they lie a dying: as a dream their false peace will vanish, and real terrors will come upon them. That expression, “When he was a dying,” reminds me of many deathbeds; but I shall not speak of them now, for I desire each one of you to rehearse the scene of his own departure, for soon of every one a tale will be told commencing—“When he was a dying.” I want each one to project his mind a little forward to the time when he must gather up his feet in the bed, pronounce his last farewell, and yield up the ghost. Before your actual departure, probably, there may be allotted to you, unless you are carried away with a sudden stroke, a little time in which it shall be said, “He was a dying.” Perhaps it is a desirable thing to occupy some weeks in departure, till the mind seems to have

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passed through the gate and to be already in the glory, while yet the body lingers here ; but as we have had no experience we are scarcely able to form a judgment. Very much might be said in favour of that sudden death which is sudden glory ; but yet one might prefer to have enough time and sufficient clearness of mind to gaze into eternity, and so to become familiar with the thought of departing out of the body. It would seem desirable to lose the dread and first surprise of the chill torrent, and to become fully at ease on the banks of Jordan, sitting with your feet up to the ankles in its stream, and by degrees descending into the greater depths, singing, singing, singing, singing, and beginning e'en on earth the everlasting song which is heard for ever on the other side the mysterious river. Such dying is a fit ending to a life of genuine piety, and both displays and proves its truthfulness. Jacob was a dying, and in his dying we see the man.

The text tells us that the patriarch's faith was firm while he was a dying, so that he poured forth no murmurs, but plentiful benedictions, as he blessed both the sons of Joseph. May your faith and mine also be such that whenever we shall be a dying our faith will perform some illustrious exploit that the grace of God may be admired in us. Paul does not say anything about Jacob's life, but selects the death scene. There were many instances of faith in Jacob's life-story, but you recollect that in the epistle to the Hebrews Paul is walking through the histories and plucking a flower here and a flower there, and he complains that time fails him even in doing that, so fertile is the garden of faith. I do not doubt, however, that he gathered the best out of each biography ; and, perhaps, the finest thing in Jacob's life was the close of it. He was more royal between the curtains of his bed than at the door of his tent : greater in the hour of his weakness than in the day of his power. Some days are damp and foggy from morning till late in the afternoon, but just before the sun goes down there is a calm, bright hour, and the sun sets in such a glory that you forget the gloom of the day. Albeit that all the former part of the day was commonplace enough, yet the closing hour is at times so gorgeous in splendour that you recollect the day for its sunset, and mark it down in your diary as a memorable date. Jacob's death has certainly so much of glorious faith in it that the apostle did well to select it for special record.

The old man of one hundred and forty-seven might have been willing to depart through infirmities of age, but yet he had much to keep him below, and make him wish to live as long as possible. After a very troublous life he had enjoyed seventeen years of remarkable comfort, so much so that, had it been ourselves, we should probably have begun to strike our roots into the soil of Goshen, and dread the bare thought of removal ; yet there sits the venerable patriarch, with his hand on his staff, ready to go, seeking no delay, but rather waiting for the salvation of God. After all his tossings to and fro, when he had been so long a pilgrim, it must have been a pleasant thing for him to have settled down in a fat land with his sons, and his grandsons, and great-grandsons all around him, all comfortably provided for, with Joseph at the head of the whole country—prime minister of Egypt—reflecting honour upon his old father, and taking care that none of the family wanted anything. The last course of Jacob's feast of life was by far

the sweetest, and the old man might have been loth to retire from so dainty a table. The children of Israel were a sort of foreign aristocracy in the land, and against them would not a dog dare to move its tongue, lest the renowned Joseph should put forth his hand. That seventeen years must have been bright, and full of rest to the old man. But sense has not killed his faith, luxury has not destroyed his spirituality; his heart is still in the tents where he had dwelt as a sojourner with God. You can see that he has not even with one single rootlet of his soul taken hold upon Egypt. His first anxiety is to take care that not even his bones shall lie in Goshen, but that his body shall be taken out of the country as a protest to his family that they are not Egyptians, and cannot be made into subjects of Pharaoh, and that Canaan is their possession to which they must come. By his dying charge to bury him in Machpelah he practically teaches his descendants that they must set loose by all the good land which they possessed in Goshen, for their inheritance did not lie on the banks of the Nile, but on the other side the desert in Canaan, and they must be on tiptoe to journey thither. The blessing which he gave to the sons of Joseph was but an utterance of his firm faith in the covenant which gave the land to him and to his seed. It was suggested by that faith of his which let go the present and grasped the future, renounced the temporal and seized the eternal, refusing the treasures of Egypt and clinging to the covenant of God.

Three things are brought before us by the text. The first is *the blessing*; the second is *the worshipping*; and the third is *the attitude*; for he "worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff," which must be significant, or else it would not have been recorded.

I. First, then, HIS BLESSING. He blessed the two sons of Joseph. Will you have patience with me while I try to show that his blessing the sons of Joseph was an act of faith, because, first, *only by faith could the old man really give a blessing to any one?* Look at him. He is too feeble to leave his bed. When he sits up supported by pillows, at what is called the bed-head, he calls for his trusty staff that he may lean upon it while he raises himself up a little, to be in a position to stretch out his hands and to use his voice. He has no strength, and his eyes are dim, so that he cannot see which is Ephraim and which is Manasseh. He is failing in most of his faculties: every way you can see that he is a worn-out old man, who can do nothing for the children whom he loves. If he is able to bestow a blessing, it cannot be by the power of nature; and yet he can and does bless them, and therefore we feel sure that there must be an inner man within that feeble old Jacob; there must be a spiritual Israel hidden away in him, an Israel who by prevailing with God as a prince has obtained a blessing, and is able to dispense it to others. And so there is; and at half a glance we see it. He rises to the dignity of a king, a prophet, and a priest when he begins to pronounce a blessing upon his two grandchildren. He believed God. He believed that God spoke by him; and he believed that God would justify every word that he was uttering. He believed in the God that heareth prayer; his benediction was a prayer; and as he pronounced blessings upon his grandsons he felt that every word he was speaking was a petition which the Lord was answering. They

were blest, and they should be blest, and he discerned it by faith. Thus, we see, he was manifesting his faith in offering believing prayer and in uttering a confident benediction. Dear friends, whether we live, or whether we die, let us have faith in God: whenever we preach or teach the gospel, let us have faith; for without faith we shall labour in vain. Whenever you distribute religious books or visit the sick, do so in faith, for faith is the life-blood of all our service. If only by faith can a dying Jacob bless his descendants, so only by faith can we bless the sons of men. Have faith in God, and the instruction which you give shall really edify, the prayers you offer shall bring down showers of mercy, and your endeavours for your sons and daughters shall be prospered. God will bless what is done in faith; but if we believe not our work will not be established. Faith is the backbone and marrow of the Christian's power to do good: we are weak as water till we enter into union with God by faith, and then we are omnipotent. We can do nothing for our fellow-men by way of promoting their spiritual and eternal interests if we walk according to the sight of our eyes; but when we get into the power of God, and grasp his promise by a daring confidence, then it is that we obtain the power to bless.

You will notice, also, that *not only the power to bless came to him by faith, but the blessings which he allotted to his grandsons were his upon the same tenure.* His legacies were all blessings which he possessed by faith only. He gave to Ephraim and Manasseh a portion each: but where and what? Did he fetch out a bag from the iron safe and say, "Here, young men, I give you the same portion of ready money as I give my sons"? No, there does not seem to have been a solitary shekel in the case. Did he call for the map of the family estates and say, "I give over to you, my boys, my freehold lands in such a parish, and my copyhold farms under such a manor"? No, no, he gave them no portion in Goshen, but each had a lot in Canaan.

Did that belong to him? Yes, in one sense, but not in another. God had promised it to him, but he had not yet a foot of land in it. The Canaanites were swarming in the land; they were dwelling in cities walled up to heaven, and held the country by the right of possession, which is nine points of the law. But the good old man talks about Canaan as if it was all his own, and he foresees the tribes growing into nations as much as if they were already in actual possession of the country. He had, as a matter of fact, neither house nor ground in Palestine, and yet he counts it all his own, since a faithful God had promised it to his fathers. God had said to Abraham, "Lift up now thine eyes and behold to the east and to the west, to the north and to the south. All this will I give thee." And Jacob realizes that gift of God as being a charter and title-deed of possession, and he acts upon it while he says, "This is for Ephraim: this is for Manasseh," though the sneering infidel standing by would have said, "Hear how the old man dotes and maunders, giving away what he has not got!" Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and she deals seriously and in a business manner with that which she makes real to herself: blind reason may ridicule, but faith is justified of all her children.

Beloved, in this manner believers bless the sons of men, namely, by faith. We pray for them, and we tell them of good things yet to come,

not to be seen of the eye, or to be perceived by the senses, but inconceivably good—things laid up by God for them that love him, which shall be the portion of our children and our friends if they believe in the living God. By faith we believe in things not seen as yet. We confess that, like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we are strangers here, and we are journeying towards a place of which God has spoken to us: “A city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” We have learned to talk about the crown which the Lord has laid up for us, and not for us only but for all them that love his appearing; and we delight to tell others how to win this crown. We point them to the narrow gate and to the narrow way, neither of which they can see, and to the end of that narrow road, even to the hill-tops crowned with the celestial city where the pilgrims of the Lord shall dwell for ever, and enjoy an eternal reward. Faith is wanted to enable us to point men to the invisible and eternal, and if we cannot do this how can we bless them. We must believe for those we love, and have hope for them; thus shall we have power with God for them, and shall bless them. Oh, you worldly fathers, you may give your sons what heritage you can, and divide among your daughters what wealth you please, but as for us, our longing is to see our children and our children’s children dowried with the riches which come from above. If they win a share in the land on the other side of Jordan, as yet unseen, and have a portion now in Christ Jesus, we shall be glad—ininitely more glad than if they were the richest among mankind. Our legacies to our sons are the blessings of grace, and our dowries to our daughters are the promises of the Lord.

It is well worthy of our notice that *the venerable patriarch Jacob in his benediction particularly mentioned the covenant*. His faith, like the faith of most of God’s people, made the covenant its pavilion of delightful abode, its tower of defence, and its armoury for war. No sweeter word was on his tongue than the covenant, and no richer consolation sustained his heart. He said to Joseph, “God almighty appeared unto me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me, and said unto me, Behold I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee.” His confidence rested in the promise of the Lord, and in the divine fidelity: that was the fountain truth from which he drew the inspiration which led him to bless his grandchildren. And, also, you notice, how he dwells upon the name of his father Abraham, and of his father Isaac, with whom the covenant had aforetime been established: the memories of covenant love are precious, and every confirmatory token is treasured up and dwelt upon. Dying men do not talk nonsense. They get to something solid, and the everlasting covenant made with their fathers, and confirmed in their own persons, has been one of the grand things about which dying saints have been wont to deliver their souls. Recollect how David said, “Although my house be not so with God, yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure.” While we are sitting here we can talk about the matter coolly, but when the death dew lies cold upon the brow, and the pulse is failing, and the throat is gradually choking up, it will be blessed to fix the eye upon the faithful promiser and to feel a calm within the soul which even death-pangs cannot disturb, because we can then exclaim, “I know

whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him until that day." My dear hearers, if you have no faith you cannot plead the covenant, and certainly if you cannot plead it for yourselves you cannot urge it with God for a blessing upon your sons and your grandsons. It was by faith in the covenant that the venerable Jacob blest the two sons of Joseph, and without it we can bless no one, for we are not blessed ourselves. Faith is the priest which proclaims the blessing without fear.

"We pronounce our benediction
O'er our son's beloved head,
For the promise is no fiction,
God will do what he has said.

"Covenant love and covenant blessing,
Cause our happy lips to bless;
For by faith each boon possessing,
Our glad hearts can do no less."

I want to call your attention to one point which I think extraordinarily illustrates the faith of Jacob. In distributing to these two grandchildren his blessings as to the future, he takes them right away from Joseph, and says, "As Simeon and Reuben shall they be mine." Do you know who those two young gentlemen were? Think awhile, and you will see that they were very different in rank, station, parentage, and prospects from any of the sons of Jacob. Jacob's sons had been brought up as labouring men, without knowledge of polite society or learned arts. They were countrymen, mere Bedouins, wandering shepherds, and nothing else; but these two young gentlemen were descended from a princess, and had, no doubt, been liberally educated. Pharaoh had given to Joseph a daughter of Poti-pherah, priest of On, and the priests of Egypt were the highest class of all—the nobility of the land. Joseph himself was prime minister, and these were partakers of his lofty rank. The sons of Reuben and Simeon were nobodies in the polite circles of Egypt—very good, decent people, farmers and graziers, but not at all of the high class of the Right Honourable Lord Manasseh and the Honourable Ephraim. Indeed, every shepherd was an abomination to the Egyptians, and therefore inadmissible to Egypt's nobility; but Manasseh and Ephraim were of a superior caste, and gentlemen of position and fortune. But *Jacob showed his faith by ignoring worldly advantages for his grandsons*. He says to Joseph, "They are not to be yours. I do not know them as Egyptians, I forget all about their mother's rank and family. The boys have attractive prospects before them; they can be made priests of the idol temple, and rise to high dignities among the Egyptians; but all that glitter we reject for them, and in token thereof I adopt them as my own sons; they are mine; as Simeon and Reuben they shall be mine. For all the gold of Egypt you would not have one of them serve an idol, for I know that you are true to your father's God and your father's faith." And so he takes the boys right away, you see, from all their brilliant opportunities, and bestows upon them that which, to the carnal mind, appears to be an estate in dreamland, a chateau in Spain, something intangible and unmarketable. This was a deed of faith, and blessed are they who can imitate it,

choosing rather the reproach of Christ for their sons than all the treasures of Egypt. The joy of it is that these lads accepted the exchange, and let the golden possessions of Egypt go like Moses after them. May our heirs and successors be of like mind, and may the Lord say of them, "Out of Egypt have I called my son"; and again, "When Ephraim was a child then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." This is how faith leads believers to bless their children. We are of the same mind as Jacob in this matter. We would sooner bury our little ones than that they should live to become amongst the richest and most famous of men, and yet not know or serve their father's God; better that we laid them quietly in such ground as our Christian brethren permit us to use as a sepulchre for our unbaptized babes; better that they were safely housed at God's right hand, than that they should grow up to plunge into dissipation or to follow false doctrine and perish out of Christ. Yes, yes, the good old man was content that his family should be as poor as he was in Canaan, so long as they might have a possession in the land of promise.

Do you not see, then, how by faith Jacob blest the two sons of Joseph, putting aside their temporal prospects and bestowing upon them the blessing which belongs to the children of the promise?

We have not done yet, for we notice that *Jacob showed his faith by blessing Joseph's sons in God's order*. He placed Ephraim before Manasseh. It was not according to the rule of nature, but he felt the impulse upon him, and his faith would not resist the divine guidance: blind as he was he would not yield to the dictation of his son, but crossed his hands to obey the divine monition. Faith resolves to do the right thing in the right way. Some persons' faith leads them to do the right thing the wrong way upwards, but matured faith follows the order which God prescribes. If God will have Ephraim first, faith does not quarrel with his decree. We may wish to see a favourite child blessed more than another, but nature must forego her choice, for the Lord must do what seemeth him good. Faith prefers grace to talent, and piety to cleverness; she lays her right hand where God lays it, and not where beauty of person or quickness of intellect would suggest. Our best child is that which God calls best; faith corrects reason and accepts the divine verdict.

Notice that *he manifested his faith by his distinct reference to redemption*. He alone who has faith will pray for the redemption of his children, especially when they exhibit no signs of being in bondage, but are hopeful and amiable. The good old man prayed, "The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads." Let your faith bring down upon your children a share in redemption's blessings, for they need to be redeemed even as others. If they are washed in the blood of Jesus, if they are reconciled to God by the blood of his Son, if they have access to God by the blood of atonement, you may die well satisfied; for what is to harm them when once the angel that redeemed you has also redeemed them? From sin, from Satan, from death, from hell, from self—"from all evil" does our Redeemer set us free; and this is the greatest of all benedictions which we can pronounce upon our dearest children. Beloved hearers, thus would I pray for you,—may the redeeming angel deliver *you* from all evil.

Jacob showed his faith by his assurance that God would be present with his seed. How cheering is the old man's dying expression, made not only to his boys, but concerning all his family. He said, "Now I die, but God will be with you." It is very different from the complaints of certain good old ministers when they are dying. They seem to say, "When I die, the light of Israel will be quenched. I shall die, and the people will desert the truth. When I am gone the standard-bearer will have fallen, and the watchman on the walls will be dead." Many in dying are afraid for the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof; and, sometimes, we who are in good health talk very much in the same fashion as though we were wonderfully essential to the progress of God's cause. I have known some of our church members speak in that manner, and enquire: "What should we do if Mr. So-and-so were dead! If our pastor were gone, what would the church do?" I will tell you what you will do without us: I will put the case as though I were myself about to die,—“Now I die, but God will be with you.” Whoever passes away, the Lord will abide with his people, and the church will be secure. The grand old cause does not depend on one or two of us. God forbid! The truth was mighty in the land before the best man living was born, and when he is carried with funeral procession, sad and slow, to his resting-place, the truth will not be buried with him, but in its own immortal youth will still be powerful; yes, and fresh advocates will arise more full of life and vigour than we are, and greater victories will be won. If you cut down yonder noble oak which now covers so wide an area with its shade, there may spring up a dozen trees which else had been overshadowed by the giant and checked in their growth: the removal of one man is often the opportunity for the springing up of scores of others to do equal service. It is grand to say with Jacob, “Now I die, but God will be with you.” Such language honours God and bespeaks a mind greatly trustful, and completely delivered from the self-conceit which dreams itself important, if not necessary, to the cause of God. So may we die trusting in the Lord, and meanwhile so may we live, reliant upon the divine power.

Thus much about Jacob's benediction. By faith he blest the two sons of Joseph.

II. We are told, next, that the old man “worshipped”—**WORSHIPPED BY FAITH.** This act no man can rightly perform without faith, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him. The point here is that he worshipped in his dying hour, and worshipped in blessing his two grandsons. Very briefly let me tell you what worship I think he rendered.

First, while he was dying he offered the worship of *gratitude*. How pleasing is the incident recorded in the tenth and eleventh verses, “Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see. And Joseph brought his two sons near unto him; and he kissed them and embraced them. And Israel said unto Joseph, I had not thought to see thy face: and, lo, God hath showed me also thy seed.” Ah, yes, we shall often have to say, “O Lord, I had not thought that thou wouldst do as much as this, but thou hast gone far beyond what I asked or even thought.” I hope that this will be amongst our dying speeches and confessions, that the half was never told us, that our good

Lord kept the best wine till the last, and that the end of the feast on earth, being but the beginning of the feast eternal in heaven, was the crown of all. Let us declare concerning our Lord that we found him better and better and better and better, even till we entered into his rest. He has been at first better than our fears, then better than our hopes, and finally better than our desires. So good, so blessed a God do we serve, that he always by his deeds of grace outruns our largest expectations. What cause we have for the worship of grateful praise; let us not be slow to render it. Jacob worshipped by expressions of gratitude.

Did he not also offer the worship of *testimony*, when he acknowledged God's goodness to him all his life? He says, "The God that fed me all my life long," thus owning that he had been always dependent but always supplied. He had been a shepherd, and he uses a word here which means "The God that shepherdized me—who was a shepherd to me all my life long." It was a testimony to the care and tenderness of Jehovah. Jacob does not murmur now, and declare that all things are against him. Now he no longer quarrels and frets, and makes rash declarations; now he does not even make a bargain with God, but he cries, "The God that fed me all my life long." Yes, and I hope we also shall finish life by magnifying the goodness of the Lord. Be this our witness, "He fed me all my life long. I was in straits sometimes, and I wondered where the next bit of bread would come from; but if he did not send a raven, or if he did not find a widow woman to provide for me, yet somehow or other he did feed me all my life long. He worked in his own wise way, so that I never lacked, for the Lord was my shepherd all my life long." Thus you see that Jacob worshipped by the testimony of faith when he came to die, and this is exceedingly acceptable with the Lord.

Notice, too, how reverently he worships the covenant messenger with the adoration of *reverent love*. He speaks of "the angel who redeemed me from all evil." He thinks of the angel that wrestled with him, and the angel that appeared to him when he fell asleep at Bethel. This is *the* angel, not an ordinary angel, but the true *archangel*—Jesus Christ—the messenger of the covenant whom we delight in. It is he that has delivered us from all evil by his redeeming blood, for no other being could have accomplished a redemption so complete. Do you remember when he came to you personally, and wrestled with you and tore away your self-righteousness, and made you limp upon your thigh? This it may be was your first introduction to him. You saw him by night, and thought him at the first to be rather your enemy than your friend. Do you recollect when he took your strength away from you, and then at last saved you, because in utter weakness, as you were about to fall to the ground, you laid hold of him and said, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me," and so you won a blessing from him? You had thought aforetime that you had strength in yourself, but now you learned that you were weakness itself, and that only as you became consciously weak would you become actually strong. You learned to look out of self to him, and do you not bless him for having taught you such a lesson? Will you not when you come to die bless him for what he did for you then, and all your life long?

O my brethren, we owe all things to the redeeming Angel of the covenant. The evils which he has warded off from us are terrible beyond conception, and the blessings he has brought us are rich beyond imagination. We must adore him, and, though we see him not, we must in life and in death by faith worship him with lowly love.

If you read on through the dying scene of Jacob you will notice once more how he worshipped with the adoration of *earnest longing*, for just after he had pronounced a blessing on the tribe of Dan the old man seemed thoroughly exhausted and gasped as if about to faint, but instead of fainting, instead of uttering a cry of pain and weakness, he solemnly exclaims, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord." It is a holy utterance interjected into the very middle of a prophecy—"I have waited for thy salvation, O God": as much as to say, "I long to be gone. My heart is all with thee. Make no tarrying, O my God. Strengthen me to get through this one more task of telling the future to my sons, and enable me to offer my last prayer for their welfare, and then, Lord, bring thy salvation."

‘Come death and some celestial band
To bear my soul away.’ ”

Thus you have had a picture of the old man blessing by faith, and worshipping by faith: faith was the mainspring of the two actions, their essence, their spirit, and their crown.

III. The last matter for us to speak upon is HIS ATTITUDE. He "worshipped leaning upon the top of his staff." The Romanists have made fine mischief out of this text, for they have read it, "He worshipped the top of his staff," and their notion has been, I suppose, that there was a pretty little god carved on the top—an image of a saint or a cross, or some other symbol, and that he held up that emblem, and so worshipped the top of his staff. We know that he did no such thing, for there is no trace in Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob of anything like the worship of images: though teraph worship lingered in their families, it was not with their consent. They were not perfect men, but they were perfectly clear from idolatry, and never worshipped an image. Nay, nay, nay; they worshipped God alone. He worshipped on the top of his staff—leaning on it, supporting himself upon it. In Genesis you read that he "bowed himself upon the bed's head." It is a very curious thing that the word for bed and the word for staff in the Hebrew are so exceedingly like each other that unless the little points had been used, which I suppose were not used at all in the olden time, it would be difficult to tell whether the word is "bed" or "staff." I do not, however, think either Moses or Paul can be wrong. Jacob strengthened himself and sat upon the bed, and he leaned upon his staff, too. It is very easy to realize a position in which both descriptions would be equally true. He could sit upon the bed, and lean on the top of his staff at the same time.

But why did he lean on his staff? What was that for? I think besides the natural need which he had of it, because of his being old, he did it emblematically. Do you not remember his saying, "With my staff I crossed this Jordan"? I believe he kept that staff throughout life as a memorial. It was a favourite staff of his which he took with

him on his first journey, and he leaned upon it as he took his last remove. "With my staff I crossed this Jordan," he had said before, and now with that staff in hand he crosses the spiritual Jordan. That staff was his life companion, the witness with himself of the goodness of the Lord, even as some of us may have an old Bible, or a knife, or a chair which are connected with memorable events of our lives.

But what did that staff indicate? Let us hear what Jacob said at another time. When he stood before Pharaoh he exclaimed, "Few and evil have been the days of *my pilgrimage*." What made him use that word "pilgrimage"? Why, because upon his mind there was always the idea of his being a pilgrim. He had been literally so during the early part of his life, wandering hither and thither; and now, though he has been seventeen years in Goshen, he keeps the old staff, and he leans on it to show that he had always been a pilgrim and a sojourner like his fathers, and that he was so still. While he leans on that staff he talks to Joseph, and he says, "Do not let my bones lie here. I have come hither in the providence of God, but I do not belong here. This staff indicates that I am only a sojourner here, and want to be gone. I am in Egypt, but I am not of it. Take my bones away. Do not let them lie here, for if they do, my sons and daughters will mingle with the Egyptians, and that must not be, for we are a distinct nation. God has chosen us for himself, and we must keep separate. To make my children see this, lo, here I die with my pilgrim staff in my hand." "Give me my staff," the old man seems to say, "I will die with it in my hand. I protest that I am not a resident here, but only a lingerer for a little while. I will stay myself upon it, and for the last time worship God in the attitude of one who longs to be up and away." Now, Christian brother, I want you to live in the same spirit, feeling that this is not your rest nor your native country. There is nothing here that is worthy of you. Your home is yonder, on the other side the desert, where God has mapped out your portion. Christ has gone to prepare your place, and it would ill become you to have no desires for it. The longer you live the more let this thought grow upon you: "Give me my staff. I must begone. Poor world, thou art no rest for me; I am not of thy children, I am an alien and a stranger. My citizenship is in heaven. I take my share in Egypt's politics and Egypt's labour, ay, and in Egypt's griefs, but I am no Egyptian, I am a stranger bound for another land." Worship on the top of your staff, and sing—

"A scrip on my back, and a staff in my hand,
I march on in haste through an enemy's land;
There is nothing on earth which can tempt me to stay,
My staff is the emblem of 'up and away.'"

Singular enough is it that each descendant of Jacob came to worship on the top of his staff at last, for on the paschal supper night, when the blood was sprinkled on the lintel and the side posts, they each one ate the lamb with their loins girt and with a staff in his hand. The supper was a festival of worship, and they ate it each one leaning on his staff, as those that were in haste to leave home for a pilgrimage through the wilderness.

Brethren and sisters, let us imitate Jacob in his dying faith. May the Holy Ghost in the power of our Lord Jesus enable you to live by faith. Live to bless others, especially your own descendants; live to worship God at all times; and live with your hand on your staff, saying always, "This is not our rest, for it is polluted."

My dear hearers, this advice does not apply to all of you, for you are not all Jacobs, nor do you belong to the believing seed. I cannot bid you take your staff, for if you were to take your staff and start off, where would you go? You have no portion in the next world, no promised land, no Canaan flowing with milk and honey. Whither will you go? You must be banished from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. Alas for you! You cannot worship, for you know not God; you cannot bless others, for you have not been blest yourselves. May the Lord bring you to his dear Son Jesus Christ, and lead you to put your trust in him, and then I shall hope that being saved you will by faith imitate Jacob, and both bless men, worship God, and wait with your staff in your hand, ready to journey to the eternal rest. The Lord be with you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Genesis *xlvi*.
28—31, and chapter *xlvi*iii.

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Lead us not into temptation.”—Matthew vi. 13.

LOOKING over a book of addresses to young people the other day, I met with the outline of a discourse which struck me as being a perfect gem. I will give it to you. The text is the Lord's prayer, and the exposition is divided into most instructive heads. “Our Father which art in heaven :” *a child away from home*. “Hallowed be thy name :” *a worshipper*. “Thy kingdom come :” *a subject*. “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven :” *a servant*. “Give us this day our daily bread :” *a beggar*. “And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors :” *a sinner*. “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil :” *a sinner in danger of being a greater sinner still*. The titles are in every case most appropriate, and truthfully condense the petition. Now if you will remember the outline you will notice that the prayer is like a ladder. The petitions begin at the top and go downward. “Our Father which art in heaven :” a child, a child of the heavenly Father. Now to be a child of God is the highest possible position of man. “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” This is what Christ is—the Son of God, and “Our Father” is but a plural form of the very term which he uses in addressing God, for Jesus says, “Father.” It is a very high, gracious, exalted position, which by faith we dare to occupy when we intelligently say, “Our Father which art in heaven.” It is a step down to the next—“Hallowed be thy name.” Here we have a worshipper adoring with lowly reverence the thrice holy God. A worshipper's place is a high one, but it attains not to the excellence of the child's position. Angels come as high as being worshippers, their incessant song hallows the name of God ; but they cannot say, “Our Father,” “for unto which of the angels hath he said, ‘thou art my son’ ?” They must be content to be within one step of the highest, but they cannot reach the summit, for neither by adoption, regeneration, nor by union to Christ, are they the children of God. “Abba, Father,” is for men, not for angels, and therefore the worshipping

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sentence of the prayer is one step lower than the opening "Our Father." The next petition is for us as subjects, "Thy kingdom come." The subject comes lower than the worshipper, for worship is an elevated engagement wherein man exercises a priesthood and is seen in lowly but honourable estate. The child worships and then confesses the Great Father's royalty. Descending still, the next position is that of a servant, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." That is another step lower than a subject, for her majesty the Queen has many subjects who are not her servants. They are not bound to wait upon her in the palace with personal service though they own her as their honoured sovereign. Dukes and such like are her subjects, but not her servants. The servant is a grade below the subject. Every one will own that the next petition is lower by far, for it is that of a beggar: "Give us this day our daily bread"—a beggar for bread—an every-day beggar—one who has continually to appeal to charity, even for his livelihood. This is a fit place for us to occupy who owe our all to the charity of heaven. But there is a step lower than the beggar's, and that is the sinner's place. "Forgive" is lowlier than "give." "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Here too we may each one take up his position, for no word better befits our unworthy lips than the prayer "Forgive." As long as we live and sin we ought to weep and cry, "Have mercy on us, O Lord." And now, at the very bottom of the ladder, stands a sinner, afraid of yet greater sin, in extreme danger and in conscious weakness, sensible of past sin and fearful of it for the future: hear him as with trembling lip he cries in the words of our text, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

And yet, dear friends, though I have thus described the prayer as a going downward, downward is in matters of grace much the same as upward, as we could readily show if time permitted. At any rate the down-going process of the prayer might equally well illustrate the advance of the divine life in the soul. The last clause of the prayer contains in it a deeper inward experience than the earlier part of it. Every believer is a child of God, a worshipper, a subject, a servant, a beggar, and a sinner; but it is not every man who perceives the allurements which beset him, or his own tendency to yield to them. It is not every child of God, even when advanced in years, who knows to the full the meaning of being led into temptation; for some follow an easy path and are seldom buffeted; and others are such tender babes that they hardly know their own corruptions. Fully to understand our text a man should have had sharp brushes in the wars and have done battle against the enemy within his soul for many a day. He who has escaped as by the skin of his teeth, offers this prayer with an emphasis of meaning. The man who has felt the fowler's net about him—the man who has been seized by the adversary and almost destroyed—he prays with awful eagerness, "Lead us not into temptation."

I purpose at this time, in trying to commend this prayer to you, to notice, first of all, *the spirit which suggests such a petition*; secondly, *the trials which such a prayer deprecates*; and then, thirdly, *the lessons which it teaches*.

I. WHAT SUGGESTS SUCH A PRAYER AS THIS?—"Lead us not into temptation."

First, from the position of the clause, I gather, by a slight reasoning process, that it is suggested by *watchfulness*. This petition follows after the sentence, "Forgive us our debts." I will suppose the petition to have been answered, and the man's sin is forgiven. What then? If you will look back upon your own lives you will soon perceive what generally happens to a pardoned man, for "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." One believing man's inner experience is like another's, and your own feelings were the same as mine. Very speedily after the penitent has received forgiveness and has the sense of it in his soul he is tempted of the devil, for Satan cannot bear to lose his subjects, and when he sees them cross the border line and escape out of his hand, he gathers up all his forces and exercises all his cunning if, perchance, he may slay them at once. To meet this special assault the Lord makes the heart watchful. Perceiving the ferocity and subtlety of Satan's temptations, the new-born believer, rejoicing in the perfect pardon he has received, cries to God, "Lead us not into temptation." It is the fear of losing the joy of pardoned sin which thus cries out to the good Lord—"Our Father, do not suffer us to lose the salvation we have so lately obtained. Do not even subject it to jeopardy. Do not permit Satan to break our new-found peace. We have but newly escaped, do not plunge us in the deeps again. Swimming to shore, some on boards and some on broken pieces of the ship, we have come safe to land; constrain us not to tempt the boisterous main again. Cast us not upon the rough billows any more. O God we see the enemy advancing: he is ready if he can to sift us as wheat. Do not suffer us to be put into his sieve, but deliver us, we pray thee." It is a prayer of watchfulness; and mark you, though we have spoken of watchfulness as necessary at the commencement of the Christian life, it is equally needful even to the close. There is no hour in which a believer can afford to slumber. Watch, I pray you, when you are alone, for temptation, like a creeping assassin, has its dagger for solitary hearts. You must bolt and bar the door well if you would keep out the devil. Watch yourself in public, for temptations in troops cause their arrows to fly by day. The choicest companions you can select will not be without some evil influence upon you unless you be on your guard. Remember our blessed Master's words, "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch," and as you watch this prayer will often rise from your inmost heart:

"From dark temptation's power,
From Satan's wiles defend;
Deliver in the evil hour,
And guide me to the end."

It is the prayer of watchfulness.

Next, it seems to me to be the natural prayer of *holy horror at the very thought of falling again into sin*. I remember the story of a pitman who, having been a gross blasphemer, a man of licentious life and everything that was bad, when converted by divine grace, was terribly afraid lest his old companions should lead him back again. He knew himself to be a man of strong passions, and very apt to be led astray by others, and therefore in his dread of being drawn into his old sins, he prayed most vehemently that sooner than ever he should go back to his old ways he might die. He did die there and then. Perhaps it was the best answer

to the best prayer that the poor man could have offered. I am sure any man who has once lived an evil life, if the wondrous grace of God has snatched him from it, will agree that the pitman's prayer was not one whit too enthusiastic. It were better for us to die at once than to live on and return to our first estate and bring dishonour upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. The prayer before us springs from the shrinking of the soul at the first approach of the tempter. The footfall of the fiend falls on the startled ear of the timid penitent; he quivers like an aspen leaf, and cries out, What, is he coming again? And is it possible that I may fall again? And may I once more defile these garments with that loathesome murderous sin which slew my Lord? "O my God," the prayer seems to say, "keep me from so dire an evil. Lead me, I pray thee, where thou wilt—ay, even through death's dark valley, but do not lead me into temptation, lest I fall and dishonour thee." The burnt child dreads the fire. He who has once been caught in the steel trap carries the scars in his flesh and is horribly afraid of being again held by its cruel teeth.

The third feeling, also, is very apparent; namely, *diffidence of personal strength*. The man who feels himself strong enough for anything is daring, and even invites the battle which will prove his power. "Oh," says he, "I care not; they may gather about me who will; I am quite able to take care of myself and hold my own against any number." He is ready to be led into conflict, he courts the fray. Not so the man who has been taught of God and has learned his own weakness; he does not want to be tried, but seeks quiet places where he may be out of harm's way. Put him into the battle and he will play the man, let him be tempted and you will see how steadfast he will be; but he does not ask for conflict, as, methinks, few soldiers will who know what fighting means. Surely it is only those who have never smelt gunpowder, or seen the corpses heaped in bloody masses on each other, that are so eager for the shot and shell, but your veteran would rather enjoy the piping times of peace. No experienced believer ever desires spiritual conflict, though perchance some raw recruits may challenge it. In the Christian a recollection of his previous weakness—his resolutions broken, his promises unkept—makes him pray that he may not in future be severely tested. He does not dare to trust himself again. He wants no fight with Satan, or with the world; but he asks that if possible he may be kept from those severe encounters, and his prayer is, "Lead us not into temptation." The wise believer shows a sacred diffidence—nay, I think I may say an utter despair of himself: and even though he knows that the power of God is strong enough for anything, yet is the sense of his weakness so heavy upon him that he begs to be spared too much trial. Hence the cry, "Lead us not into temptation."

Nor have I quite exhausted, I think, the phases of the spirit which suggests this prayer, for it seems to me to arise somewhat out of *charity*. "Charity?" say you. "How so?" Well, the connection is always to be observed, and by reading the preceding sentence in connection with it we get the words, "as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation." We should not be too severe with those persons who have done wrong, and have offended us, but pray, "Lord, lead us not into temptation." Your maid-servant, poor girl, did purloin a trifle from your

property. I make no excuse for her theft, but I beseech you pause awhile before you quite ruin her character for life. Ask yourself, "Might not I have done the same had I been in her position? Lord, lead me not into temptation." It is true it was very wrong in that young man to deal so dishonestly with your goods. Still, you know, he was under great pressure from a strong hand, and only yielded from compulsion. Do not be too severe. Do not say, "I will push the matter through; I will have the law of him." No, but wait awhile; let pity speak, let mercy's silver voice plead with you. Remember yourself, lest you also be tempted, and pray, "Lead us not into temptation." I am afraid that badly as some behave under temptation, others of us might have done worse if we had been there. I like, if I can, to form a kind judgment of the erring; and it helps me to do so when I imagine myself to have been subject to their trials, and to have looked at things from their point of view, and to have been in their circumstances, and to have nothing of the grace of God to help me: should I not have fallen as badly as they have done, or even gone beyond them in evil? May not the day come to you who show no mercy in which you may have to ask mercy for yourselves? Did I say—may it not come to you? Nay, *it must* come to you. When leaving all below you will have to take a retrospective view of your life, and see much to mourn over, to what can you appeal then but to the mercy of God? And what if he should answer you, "An appeal was made to *your* mercy, and you had none. As you rendered unto others so will I render unto you." What answer would you have if God were so to treat you? Would not such an answer be just and right? Should not every man be paid in his own coin when he stands at the judgment seat? So I think that this prayer, "Lead us not into temptation," should often spring up from the heart through a charitable feeling towards others who have erred, who are of the same flesh and blood as ourselves. Now, whenever you see the drunkard reel through the streets do not glory over him, but say, "Lead us not into temptation." When you take down the papers and read that men of position have betrayed their trust for gold, condemn their conduct if you will, but do not exult in your own steadfastness, rather cry in all humility, "Lead us not into temptation." When the poor girl seduced from the paths of virtue comes across your way, look not on her with the scorn that would give her up to destruction, but say, "Lead us not into temptation." It would teach us milder and gentler ways with sinful men and women if this prayer were as often in our hearts as it is upon our lips.

Once more, do you not think that this prayer breathes the spirit of *confidence*—confidence in God? "Why," says one, "I do not see that." To me—I know not whether I shall be able to convey my thought—to me there is a degree of very tender familiarity and sacred boldness in this expression. Of course, God will lead me now that I am his child. Moreover, now that he has forgiven me, I know that he will not lead me where I can come to any harm. This my faith ought to know and believe, and yet for several reasons there rises to my mind a fear lest his providence should conduct me where I shall be tempted. Is that fear right or wrong? It burdens my mind; may I go with it to my God? May I express in prayer this misgiving of soul? May I pour out this

anxiety before the great, wise, loving God? Will it not be impertinent? No, it will not, for Jesus puts the words into my mouth and says, "After this manner pray ye." You are afraid that he may lead you into temptation; but he will not do so; or should he see fit to try you, he will also afford you strength to hold out to the end. He will be pleased in his infinite mercy to preserve you. Where he leads it will be perfectly safe for you to follow, for his presence will make the deadliest air to become healthful. But since instinctively you have a dread lest you should be conducted where the fight will be too stern and the way too rough, tell it to your heavenly Father without reserve. You know at home if a child has any little complaint against his father it is always better for him to tell it. If he thinks that his father overlooked him the other day, or half thinks that the task his father has given him is too severe, or fancies that his father is expecting too much of him—if he does not say anything at all about it, he may sulk and lose much of the loving tenderness which a child's heart should always feel. But when the child frankly says, "Father, I do not want you to think that I do not love you or that I cannot trust you, but I have a troublous thought in my mind, and I will tell it right straight out"; that is the wisest course to follow, and shows a filial trust. That is the way to keep up love and confidence. So if thou hast a suspicion in thy soul that mayhap thy Father might put thee into temptation too strong for thee, tell it to him. Tell it to him, though it seems taking a great liberty. Though the fear may be the fruit of unbelief yet make it known to thy Lord, and do not harbour it sullenly. Remember the Lord's prayer was not made for him, but for you, and therefore it reads matters from your standpoint and not from his. Our Lord's prayer is not for our Lord; it is for us, his children; and children say to their fathers ever so many things which it is quite proper for them to say, but which are not wise and accurate after the measure of their parents' knowledge. Their father knows what their hearts mean, and yet there may be a good deal in what they say which is foolish or mistaken. So I look upon this prayer as exhibiting that blessed childlike confidence which tells out to its father a fear which grieves it, whether that fear be altogether correct or no. Beloved, we need not here debate the question whether God does lead into temptation or not, or whether we can fall from grace or not; it is enough that we have a fear, and are permitted to tell it to our Father in heaven. Whenever you have a fear of any kind, hurry off with it to him who loves his little ones, and like a father pities them and soothes even their needless alarms.

Thus have I shown that the spirit which suggests this prayer is that of watchfulness, of holy horror at the very thought of sin, of diffidence of our own strength, of charity towards others, and of confidence in God.

II. Secondly, let us ask, WHAT ARE THESE TEMPTATIONS WHICH THE PRAYER DEPRECATES? or say rather, what are these trials which are so much feared?

I do not think the prayer is intended at all to ask God to spare us from being afflicted for our good, or to save us from being made to suffer as a chastisement. Of course we should be glad to escape those things; but the prayer aims at another form of trial, and may be paraphrased thus—"Save me, O Lord, from such trials and sufferings as may lead me into

sin. Spare me from too great trials, lest I fall by their overcoming my patience, my faith, or my steadfastness."

Now, as briefly as I can, I will show you how men may be led into temptation by the hand of God.

And the first is *by the withdrawal of divine grace*. Suppose for a moment—it is only a supposition—suppose the Lord were to leave us altogether, then should we perish speedily; but suppose—and this is not a barren supposition—that he were in some measure to take away his strength from us, should we not be in an evil case? Suppose he did not support our faith: what unbelief we should exhibit. Suppose he refused to support us in the time of trial so that we no longer maintained our integrity, what would become of us? Ah, the most upright man would not be upright long, nor the most holy, holy any more. Suppose, dear friend,—you who walk in the light of God's countenance and bear life's yoke so easily because he sustains you—suppose his presence were withdrawn from you, what must be your portion? We are all so like to Samson in this matter that I must bring him in as the illustration, though he has often been used for that purpose by others. So long as the locks of our head are unshorn we can do anything and everything: we can rend lions, carry gates of Gaza, and smite the armies of the alien. It is by the divine consecrating mark that we are strong in the power of his might; but if the Lord be once withdrawn and we attempt the work alone, then are we weak as the tiniest insect. When the Lord hath departed from thee, O Samson, what art thou more than another man? Then the cry, "the Philistines be upon thee, Samson," is the knell of all thy glory. Thou dost vainly shake those lusty limbs of thine. Now thou wilt have thine eyes put out and the Philistines will make sport of thee. In view of a like catastrophe we may well be in an agony of supplication. Pray then, "Lord, leave me not; and lead me not into temptation by taking thy Spirit from me."

"Keep us, Lord, oh keep us ever,
Vain our hope if left by thee;
We are thine, oh leave us never,
Till thy face in heaven we see;
There to praise thee
Through a bright eternity.

"All our strength at once would fail us,
If deserted, Lord, by thee;
Nothing then could aught avail us,
Certain our defeat would be:
'Those who hate us
Thenceforth their desire would see."

Another set of temptations will be found in *providential conditions*. The words of Agur, the son of Jakeh, shall be my illustration here. "Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me; lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." Some of us have never known what actual want means, but have from our youth up lived in social comfort. Ah, dear friends, when we see what extreme poverty has made some

men do, how do we know that we should not have behaved even worse if we had been as sorely pressed as they? We may well shudder and say, "Lord, when I see poor families crowded together in one little room where there is scarcely space to observe common decency; when I see hardly bread enough to keep the children from crying for hunger; when I see the man's garments wearing out upon his back, and by far too thin to keep out the cold; I pray thee subject me not to such trial, lest if I were in such a case I might put forth my hand and steal. Lead me not into the temptation of pining want."

And, on the other hand, look at the temptations of money when men have more to spend than they can possibly need, and there is around them a society which tempts them into racing, and gambling, and whoredom, and all manner of iniquities. The young man who has a fortune ready to hand before he reaches years of discretion, and is surrounded by flatterers and tempters all eager to plunder him; do you wonder that he is led into vice, and becomes a ruined man morally? Like a rich galleon waylaid by pirates, he is never out of danger; is it a marvel that he never reaches the port of safety? Women tempt him, men flatter him, vile messengers of the devil fawn upon him, and the young simpleton goes after them like an ox to the slaughter, or as a bird hasteth to the snare and knoweth not that it is for his life. You may very well thank heaven you never knew the temptation, for if it were put in your way you would also be in sore peril. If riches and honour allure you, follow not eagerly after them, but pray, "Lead us not into temptation."

Providential positions often try men. There is a man very much pushed for ready money in business; how shall he meet that heavy bill? If he does not meet it there will be desolation in his family; the mercantile concern from which he now draws his living will be broken up; everybody will be ashamed of him, his children will be outcasts, and he will be ruined. He has only to use a sum of trust money: he has no right to risk a penny of it, for it is not his, but still by its temporary use he may perchance tide over the difficulty. The devil tells him he can put it back in a week. If he does touch that money it will be a roguish action, but then he says, "Nobody will be hurt by it, and it will be a wonderful accommodation," and so on. If he yields to the suggestion, and the thing goes right, there are some who would say, "Well, after all, there was not much harm in it, and it was a prudent step, for it saved him from ruin." But if it goes wrong, and he is found out, then everybody says, "It was a shameful robbery. The man ought to be transported." But, brethren, the action was wrong in itself, and the consequences neither make it better nor worse. Do not bitterly condemn, but pray again and again, "Lead us not into temptation. Lead us not into temptation." You see God does put men into such positions in providence at times that they are severely tried. It is for their good that they are tried, and when they can stand the trial they magnify his grace, and they themselves become stronger men: the test has beneficial uses when it can be borne, and God therefore does not always screen his children from it. Our heavenly Father has never meant to cuddle us up and keep us out of temptation, for that is no part of the system which he has wisely arranged for our education. He does not mean us to be

babies in go-carts all our lives. He made Adam and Eve in the garden, and he did not put an iron pallisade round the tree of knowledge, and say, "You cannot get at it." No, he warned them not to touch the fruit, but they could reach the tree if they would. He meant that they should have the possibility of attaining the dignity of voluntary fidelity if they remained steadfast, but they lost it by their sin; and God means in his new creation not to shield his people from every kind of test and trial, for that were to breed hypocrites and to keep even the faithful weak and dwarfish. The Lord does sometimes put the chosen where they are tried, and we do right to pray, "Lead us not into temptation."

And there are temptations arising out of *physical conditions*. There are some men who are very moral in character because they are in health; and there are other men who are very bad, who, I do not doubt, if we knew all about them, should have some little leniency shown them, because of the unhappy conformation of their constitution. Why, there are many people to whom to be cheerful and to be generous is no effort whatsoever, while there are others who need to labour hard to keep themselves from despair and misanthropy. Diseased livers, palpitating hearts, and injured brains are hard things to struggle against. Does that poor old lady complain? She has only had the rheumatism thirty years, and yet she now and then murmurs! How would you be if you felt her pains for thirty minutes? I have heard of a man who complained of everybody. When he came to die, and the doctors opened his skull they found a close fitting brain-box, and that the man suffered from an irritable brain. Did not that account for a great many of his hard speeches? I do not mention these matters to excuse sin, but to make you and myself treat such people as gently as we can, and pray, "Lord, do not give me such a brain-box, and do not let me have such rheumatisms or such pains, because upon such a rack I may be much worse than they are. Lead us not into temptation."

So, again, *mental conditions* often furnish great temptations. When a man becomes depressed he becomes tempted. Those among us who rejoice much often sink about as much as we rise, and when everything looks dark around us Satan is sure to seize the occasion to suggest despondency. God forbid that we should excuse ourselves, but, dear brother, pray that you be not led into this temptation. Perhaps if you were as much a subject of nervousness and sinking of spirit as the friend you blame for his melancholy, you might be more blameworthy than he, therefore pity rather than condemn.

And, on the other hand, when the spirits are exhilarated and the heart is ready to dance for joy, it is very easy for levity to step in and for words to be spoken amiss. Pray the Lord not to let you rise so high nor sink so low as to be led into evil. "Lead us not into temptation," must be our hourly prayer.

Further than this, there are temptations arising out of *personal associations*, which are formed for us in the order of providence. We are bound to shun evil company, but there are cases in which, without fault on their part, persons are made to associate with bad characters. I may instance the pious child whose father is a swearer, and the godly woman lately converted, whose husband remains a swearer and blasphemes the

name of Christ. It is the same with workmen who have to labour in workshops, where lewd fellows at every half-a-dozen words let fall an oath, and pour forth that filthy language which shocks us every day more and more. I think that in London our working people talk more filthily than ever they did; at least, I hear more of it as I pass along or pause in the street. Well, if persons are obliged to work in such shops, or to live in such families there may come times when under the lash of jest and sneer and sarcasm the heart may be a little dismayed and the tongue may refuse to speak for Christ. Such a silence and cowardice are not to be excused, yet do not censure thy brother, but say, "Lord, lead me not into temptation." How know you that you would be more bold? Peter quailed before a talkative maid, and you may be cowed by a woman's tongue. The worst temptation for a young Christian that I know of is to live with a hypocrite—a man so sanctified and demure that the young heart, deceived by appearances, fully trusts him while the wretch is false at heart and rotten in life. And such wretches there are who, with the pretence and affectation of sanctimoniousness, will do deeds at which we might weep tears of blood: young people are frightfully staggered, and many of them become deformed for life in their spiritual characteristics through associating with such beings as these. When you see faults caused by such common but horrible causes, say to yourself, "Lord, lead me not into temptation. I thank thee for godly parents and for Christian associations and for godly examples; but what might I have been if I had been subjected to the very reverse? If evil influences had touched me when like a vessel I was upon the wheel, I might have exhibited even grosser failings than those which I now see in others."

Thus I might continue to urge you to pray, dear friends, against various temptations; but let me say, the Lord has for some men very *special tests*, such as may be seen in the case of Abraham. He gives him a son in his old age, and then says to him, "Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him for a burnt-offering." You will do right to pray, "Lord, lead me not into such a temptation as that. I am not worthy to be so tried. Oh do not so test me." I have known some Christians sit down and calculate whether they could have acted as the patriarch did. It is very foolish, dear brother. When you are called upon to do it you will be enabled to make the same sacrifice by the grace of God, but if you are not called upon to do it, why should the power be given? Shall God's grace be left unused? Your strength shall be equal to your day, but it shall not exceed it. I would have you ask to be spared the sterner tests.

Another instance is to be seen in Job. God gave Job over to Satan with a limit, and you know how Satan tormented him and tried to overwhelm him. If any man were to pray, "Lord, try me like Job," it would be a very unwise prayer. "Oh, but I could be as patient as he," say you. You are the very man who would yield to bitterness, and curse your God. The man who could best exhibit the patience of Job will be the first, according to his Lord's bidding, fervently to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." Dear friends, we are to be prepared for trial if God wills it, but we are not to court it, but are rather to pray against it, even as our Lord Jesus, though ready to drink the bitter cup, yet in an agony exclaimed, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Trials sought

after are not such as the Lord has promised to bless. No true child asks for the rod.

To put my meaning in a way in which it will be clearly seen let me tell an old story. I have read in history that two men were condemned to die as martyrs in the burning days of Queen Mary. One of them boasted very loudly to his companion of his confidence that he should play the man at the stake. He did not mind the suffering, he was so grounded in the gospel that he knew he should never deny it. He said that he longed for the fatal morning even as a bride for the wedding. His companion in prison in the same chamber was a poor trembling soul, who could not and would not deny his Master ; but he told his companion that he was very much afraid of the fire. He said he had always been very sensitive of suffering, and he was in great dread that when he began to burn the pain might cause him to deny the truth. He besought his friend to pray for him, and he spent his time very much in weeping over his weakness and crying to God for strength. The other continually rebuked him, and chided him for being so unbelieving and weak. When they both came to the stake, he who had been so bold recanted at the sight of the fire and went back ignominiously to an apostate's life, while the poor trembling man whose prayer had been, "Lead me not into temptation," stood firm as a rock, praising and magnifying God as he was burnt to a cinder. Weakness is our strength ; and our strength is weakness. Cry unto God that he try you not beyond your strength ; and in the shrinking tenderness of your conscious weakness breathe out the prayer, "Lead us not into temptation." Then if he does lead you into the conflict, his Holy Spirit will strengthen you, and you will be brave as a lion before the adversary. Though trembling and shrinking within yourself before the throne of God, you would confront the very devil and all the hosts of hell without one touch of fear. It may seem strange, but so the case is.

III. And now I conclude with the last head—THE LESSONS WHICH THIS PRAYER TEACHES. I have not time to enlarge. I will just throw them out in the rough.

The first lesson from the prayer, "Lead us not into temptation," is this : *Never boast your own strength.* Never say, "Oh, I shall never fall into such follies and sins. They may try me, but they will find more than a match in me." Let not him that putteth on his harness boast as though he were putting it off. Never indulge one thought of congratulation as to self-strength. You have no power of your own, you are as weak as water. The devil has only to touch you in the right place and you will run according to his will. Only let a loose stone or two be moved and you will soon see that the feeble building of your own natural virtue will come down at a run. Never court temptation by boasting your own capacity.

The next thing is, *never desire trial.* Does anybody ever do that? Yes ; I heard one say the other day that God had so prospered him for years that he was afraid he was not a child of God, for he found that God's children were chastised, and therefore he almost wished to be afflicted. Dear brother, do not wish for that : you will meet with trouble soon enough. If I were a little boy at home, I do not think I should say to my brother, because he had been whipped, "I am afraid I am not my father's child, and fear that he does not love me because I

am not smarting under the rod. I wish he would whip me just to let me know his love." No; no child would ever be so stupid. We must not for any reason desire to be afflicted or tried, but must pray, "Lead us not into temptation."

The next thought is, *never go into temptation*. The man who prays "Lead us not into temptation," and then goes into it is a liar before God. What a hypocrite a man must be who utters this prayer, and then goes off to the theatre! How false is he who offers this prayer and then stands at the bar and drinks and talks with depraved men and bedizened girls! "Lead us not into temptation," is shameful profanity when it comes from the lips of men who resort to places of amusement whose moral tone is bad. "Oh," say you, "you should not tell us of such things." Why not? Some of you do them, and I make bold to rebuke evil wherever it is found, and shall do so while this tongue can move. There is a world of cant about. People go to church and say, "Lead us not into temptation," and then they know where temptation is to be found, and they go straight into it. You need not ask the Lord not to lead you there; he has nothing to do with you. The devil and you between you will go far enough without mocking God with your hypocritical prayers. The man who goes into sin wilfully with his eyes open, and then bends his knee, and says half-a-dozen times over in his church on a Sunday morning "Lead us not into temptation," is a hypocrite without a mask upon him. Let him take that home to himself, and believe that I mean to be personal to him, and to such barefaced hypocrites as he.

The last word is, if you pray God not to lead you into temptation, *do not lead others there*. Some seem to be singularly forgetful of the effect of their example, for they will do evil things in the presence of their children and those who look up to them. Now I pray you consider that by ill example you destroy others as well as yourself. Do nothing, my dear brother, of which you have need to be ashamed, or which you would not wish others to copy. Do the right at all times, and do not let Satan make a "cat's paw" of you to destroy the souls of others: do you pray, "Lead us not into temptation"; then do not lead your children there. They are invited during the festive season to such and such a family party, where there will be everything but what will conduce to their spiritual growth or even to their good morals: do not allow them to go. Put your foot down. Be steadfast about it. Having once prayed, "Lead us not into temptation," act not the hypocrite by allowing your children to go into it.

God bless these words to us. May they sink into our souls, and if any feel that they have sinned, oh that they may now ask forgiveness through the precious blood of Christ, and find it by faith in him. When they have obtained mercy, let their next desire be that they may be kept in future from sinning as they did before, and therefore let them pray, "Lead us not into temptation." God bless you.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew vi. 1—24.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—23 (Vers. III.), 1001, 668.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

GOD'S ADVOCATES BREAKING SILENCE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 17TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Suffer me a little, and I will shew thee that I have yet to speak on God's behalf."—Job xxxvi. 2.

ELIHU was sufficiently severe with Job, but as this arose from his honest conviction that Job had spoken amiss, we cannot blame him. The style of his address is, in some points, highly commendable. We admire the courtesy which moved him to say, "*Suffer me a little.*" It shows some little consideration for his audience. It is to be feared that under our preaching our people do suffer greatly, and we do not sympathize with their sense of weariness; else might we often apologize in the terms of Elihu, saying, "Suffer me a little."

I admire Elihu's attempt at brevity; I call it an attempt, for I am not quite sure that he succeeded, for he filled two chapters more. Yet he said, "Suffer me *a little*"; and thereby promised to make his oration as short as he could. Some lengthy divines, with their many divisions, their "Finallies," and "Lastlies," and concluding observations, spin and spin, and cause their congregations to suffer, and that not a little, but exceeding much. It is well when we have anything good to say to use as few words as possible, for if brevity be not the garment of grace it is the soul of wit, and all our wits should be set to work to put gospel teaching into such a form that it will be the better received. Assuredly, short and pointed addresses are more likely to reach the heart than long and dreary sermons. If our preaching be so poor that the people suffer, it is better that they suffer little rather than much; and if our ministry be very rich and satisfying, it is better to send the people home longing than loathing.

We may also admire the prudence of Elihu in dividing his discourse into four or five portions. If you turn to the book of Job you will see that he has been speaking ever since the thirty-second chapter, and he has made at least three pauses, and it may be that these filled up considerable intervals. His talk would have reached an unbearable length had he continued to speak on and on without a parenthesis of silence;

No. 1,403.

How will Satan's kingdom be moved if you all do it with power from on high, the power of the Holy Ghost !

In our text we have a duty set before us. First, *let us think of it*; secondly, *let us consider how to perform it*; and thirdly, *let us do it at once*.

I. We have before us a privilege and a duty,—“I have yet to speak on God's behalf :” LET US THINK OF IT. Speech is the high prerogative of man. It is given to him alone of all earthly creatures ; he is the one sole articulate voice for this lower world. Birds and beasts, fishes and creeping things, mountains and seas, mean the praises of God, but they cannot express them. Man is the world's tongue : it were well if that tongue were always sanctified to the divine service, for otherwise it misrepresents the universe for which it should be the interpreter.

Of our text we note that *the subject is sublime*. “I have yet to speak on God's behalf.” Is it not a high calling and an exalted theme ? The cause of God and truth deserves seraphic eloquence. At first sight it seems as if it were needless to speak on behalf of God. He is so great that human opinion can be of no consequence to him ; he is so good that he cannot need defence. His claims are so clear, does he need that they should be pleaded ? Alas, my brethren, pleaders for God and advocates of his cause have always been needed since that evil day when he was slandered in Paradise, and our first parents lifted disobedient hands to pluck the forbidden fruit. Though no voice is so sweet as the divine, man is hardened against his God, and it is the office of the whole church with a thousand voices to be continually crying in the world's dull ear and speaking on the behalf of God. There is need, and growing need, that we should lift up our voices for our God and his gospel ; yet may we tremble as we enter upon the enterprise. Who shall fitly commend perfection ? Who shall vindicate spotless purity ? Who shall rightly tell of insulted justice, or who shall declare boundless love ? The theme will exhaust every faculty when elevated to the highest degree and strengthened to its utmost possibility. To speak on God's behalf : this is a lofty argument indeed, and yet we will not flinch from it, for it is natural that we should speak for him to whom we owe everything. If we have a tongue at all we ought to speak here ; if silent upon all other themes, yet never should we be unwilling to speak for our God. The stones themselves might speak if we should hold our speech in such a cause. The theme might make slow speaking Moses wax as eloquent as his brother Aaron. A God so good, so good to us, so good beyond all imagination, deserves that we shake off our cowardice and speak out for him manfully ! Reflect, my brothers, who are called to speak on the behalf of God, that since he has provided an advocate for you, you are bound to become advocates for him. What a pleader has he set apart for you ! It is Christ of whom we read “Never man spake like this man.” Our glorious Mediator stands for ever pleading the causes of our souls, and it is but natural and right, therefore, that his redeemed should with all their hearts plead his cause before the sons of men.

And yet there are few who speak on the behalf of God. I mean more than perhaps you think. There are few who vindicate the honour of Jehovah, and view matters from his throne. Their eyes look elsewhere, and not to the sacred Majesty of the Supreme Being. Many are the

preachers of the gospel, but still I note but few who even preach the gospel *on behalf of God*. There are two aspects of the gospel, the one which looks towards man, and the other which looks towards God: he who preaches the gospel only from its manward side is apt to forget its major part. He regards man with a pity and sympathy most fitting and proper; but, alas, too often he fails in sympathy with God, and in distinct recognition of the claims and rights of the great Sovereign. How seldom is divine sovereignty spoken of! Man is looked upon as though he were a deserving creature and had a right to salvation. One would think, to hear some preachers, that God was under obligation to man, or, at least, that he had no will of his own, but had left man's will to be supreme. The truth is that if all the race had been condemned, God would have been infinitely just, and if he spares one and not another none can say unto him "What doest thou?" His declaration is "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." I sympathize with man, but I have in my very soul an infinitely deeper sympathy with God. I am bound to love my neighbour as myself, but the still higher law calls on me to love the Lord my God with all my heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. Speaking on behalf of man may be carried so far that you come at length to look upon sin as his misfortune rather than his fault, and to view the fact that sin is punished at all as a matter to be deplored. In some professed Christians their pity for the criminal has overcome their horror at the crime. Eternal punishment is denied, not because the scriptures are not plain enough on that point, but because man has become the god of man, and everything must be toned down to suit the tender feelings of an age which excuses sin but denounces its penalties, which has no condemnation for the offence, but spends its denunciations upon the Judge and his righteous sentence. By all means have sympathies manward, but at the same time show some tenderness towards the dishonoured law and the insulted Lord. Is justice a figment? Is there no necessity for divine anger? Is mercy itself become a debt due to mankind? See you nothing horrible in sin? Is there no guilt in rejecting Christ and trampling on his blood? Ay, and is there none in closing the eyes even to the feeblér light which streams from the visible works of God, and reveals his power and Godhead? Few, I say, look at the matter in this light, and yet it should be the main business of every believer "to speak on God's behalf." It becomes, therefore, all the more needful that those who have been led to side with God, and who feel their hearts drawn to adore and magnify and vindicate their glorious Lord, should count it a privilege still to be spared to speak on the behalf of God. I would silence no voice that speaks for man so far as it speaks truthfully, but oh for more voices to speak for God and maintain his crown rights. It needs that we vindicate his law and the terrors of it, his gospel and the sovereignty of it, his nature and the completeness of it, his providence and the wisdom of it, his redemption and the efficacy of it, his eternal purpose and the accomplishment of it. May this theme, though silent long, be sounded forth till its voice is heard in every street of Zion. Not the exaggeration of divine truth, but that truth itself, we desire to hear, and God grant we may live to hear it. May many a man of God be constrained to say, "I have yet

to speak on God's behalf." Let others plead what cause they will, it is ours with the greatest of poets "To justify the ways of God to men."

While thinking over the work described in the text we would further remark that *the call is personal*,—"I have yet to speak on God's behalf." Do we not as believers in Jesus recognise ourselves in that little word *I*? "I have yet to speak," though hitherto a listener as Elihu was while the elders gave each one his opinion. *I*, though silenced for awhile, blessed be his name, have yet to speak on God's behalf. The harp has hung awhile upon the wall, and pined in silence; but now the Chief Musician takes it down again, and almost before he sweeps the chords every string begins to thrill with delight at the thought that he will make them resound again; for the cobweb and the dust suit not the lyre which for so many years has welcomed the sacred touch. Have you been laid aside awhile, brother or sister? Then rejoice in the day of your restoration and say, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf." *I*, again, though not the wisest nor the best, have my testimony to bear even as Elihu did, who had aforetime given place to those whom he thought to be wiser than he. His words were, "I am young, and ye are very old; wherefore I was afraid and durst not shew you mine opinion. I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom. But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding": and so though esteeming himself to be least, and therefore fitly coming last, he rose in his place and faithfully delivered his soul. O you that are not eloquent, whose tongues will scarce respond to your thoughts, nevertheless ye have to speak in the name of the Lord in ways as forcible as uttered language. Take care that ye do so, and make no long delays, but look forward eagerly for times when you shall speak on God's behalf after your own manner. The smallest bell in the steeple is needed to complete the chime, and the tiniest bird in the wood would be missed if its note were hushed; therefore come thou forth, O least of all the brotherhood, for without thy presence the Father's family is not complete. All voices are needed; no child of God may be dumb. You, too, who are conscious of great weakness and unworthiness, I invite you to say, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf"; for this man Elihu was a trembler like yourselves. In the thirty-seventh chapter he says, "At this also my heart trembleth, and is moved out of his place." Nor did he feel that his abilities were equal to his subject, for in the nineteenth verse of the same chapter he breathed this prayer, "Teach us what we shall say unto him; for we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness;" and yet though conscious of his inability to handle the theme, and trembling under its power, he nevertheless rejoiced to feel that he must speak something and somehow, and he opened his mouth boldly in the name of the Lord. Brother, work for God, whether you can or not; power will increase as you use the little you possess. You will learn to speak more graciously as you proceed, if not more fluently and accurately. Therefore plunge into the middle of the matter, saying, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf." Glory be to God, the devil himself cannot silence the man whose mouth the Lord has opened and whose heart he has quickened by his truth. He may be laid aside for many a day, and it may seem to his fellow-men that he is useless and worthless, but the hour will want the man, and the man will seize the hour, and he will speak so as

to be heard. Only let thy heart be ready and thy spirit watchful and waiting, and the time shall surely come when, though thou art now a poor prattling babe, thou shalt speak like a man on God's behalf.

I think, dear friends, I may now make a third remark, namely, that *in the text, the reminder is seasonable*, and may be addressed most opportunely to many of us, "I have *yet* to speak on God's behalf." Does not this arouse thee, O silent and sluggish soul? Hast thou been hidden among the stuff all these days? Art thou on the Lord's side but of a faint heart? Hast thou never found a tongue? Wake up, my brother, and say, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf." Is it not written, "Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing"? How canst thou bear a life-long silence, when to me even a few weeks become irksome? Our children need no encouragement to talk, and should the children of God be tongue-tied?

I have thought lately a great deal about Zacharias who was struck dumb while sacrificing in the temple, on account of his unbelief, but was assured that in a few months he should speak again. How I should have watched those weary weeks until the day should come when my tongue should once more express my thoughts. How glad should I be as the day drew near! Hast thou been shut up, brother, so that thou couldst not come forth? Then cheer thyself and look out for the day when thou wilt say, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf."

This thought may justly occur to us after times of great deliverance. David had been seized by the Philistines and taken before king Abimelech, and had only escaped by feigning madness. No sooner was he safe than he said, "I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise shall continually be in my mouth" (Ps. xxxiv. 1). Amongst the verses of that grateful song you read the following, "Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord." He felt bound to tell the Lord's goodness both to old and young. When we are raised from deep distress we should never fail to say, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf."

The same is true if you have been conscious of a grave fault and have received forgiveness; then, too, you have yet to speak on God's behalf, and you may be very glad of it, for it will serve as a pledge of your forgiveness. Poor Peter might very naturally have remained quiet throughout the rest of his life after having denied his Master, but it must have cheered him to remember that the Lord had said beforehand, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Moreover, he felt the certainty of his Lord's forgiving love when by the sea of Galilee in loving tones he said, "Feed my sheep." Do you wonder that, on the day of Pentecost, Peter felt a joy not to be expressed as he said to himself, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf; even I, who once denied him, am yet allowed to be his advocate and to proclaim his grace"?

Beloved friends, if any of you have been disappointed in your Christian work and are therefore cast down, I want you to take my text as a motto still. Have you fallen into the condition of the prophet Jeremiah, of whom we read, "Then I said I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name"? Have you been despised and defamed, laughed at and rejected; and you fear that you have done no good, and that you are altogether unfit for the service? Do you therefore cry,

"I will speak no more in the name of the Lord"? Mark, my brother, you will not easily abide in silence, for your experience will soon be like that of the prophet: "But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." You will be obliged to speak; yea, again and again you will be compelled to say, "I have yet to speak in the name of the Lord." Perhaps you have been foolish like Jonah, and have run away from the Lord's service, and now you have just escaped from the deeps, with the sea slime upon you, and the tokens of the whale's belly about you. What then? Why, the first thing you have to do, almost before you brush your clothes, is to hasten to Nineveh and deliver your Lord's message, for you have yet to speak on God's behalf. Though you have once refused, you will be brought to do it, and it will be well to yield at once, and go boldly with this doctrine in your heart, "Salvation is of the Lord"; and with this message upon your tongue, "Repent and seek the Lord." If you go at once your voice shall ring through the streets of Nineveh, and the man with the salt-sea smell upon him shall be more revered in the streets of Nineveh than if he had come there perfumed from the courts of kings.

Take the text home as coming seasonably to many characters here. I cannot tell the exact condition of each brother's and sister's heart, and yet I think if I could read your inmost souls I should see the strongest reasons why this should be the soliloquy of each one, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf."

Furthermore, while thinking this matter over, let us remark that *this duty is a very solemn and arduous one*, and consequently it deserves our best possible preparations. When a young barrister was chosen years ago, almost within the recollection of our older folks, to advocate the cause of a queen whose character had been questioned, I can imagine him sitting up late and rising early that he might study his brief and get the whole matter well into his mind, and choose out goodly words with which to urge her suit. I can conceive the trepidation with which he stood up in the Hall at Westminster to plead for one whom many in the nation regarded as an injured queen. But all that feeling of responsibility should be far outdone by every one who has to speak for God. To rush from your bed to the pulpit to talk what first comes to hand seems to me to be next door to profanity. Even to talk to little children about Jesus without the slightest anxiety beforehand cannot be excused. We should not offer unto God that which costs us nothing; and if we stand up to plead for him, surely it should not be said that the first time we saw our brief was when we appeared in court. No, fetch your words from far; let them be gained by diving into the deeps of your own soul and into the depths of the divine word. Say to yourself, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf, and I would do it with my utmost ability. O ye powers of mind, be ready; but, above all, O power divine, rest thou on me, for he that speaks *for* God should speak *by* God, or else he speaks in vain."

If we have to speak for God we should certainly do it with all zeal and earnestness. A cold advocacy of the cause of God is next door to an attack upon it. To speak for God with careless air, with bated breath, or with affected tone is gravely unbecoming in a case where faith and fire should be the main attributes of the speaker. Let us throw

ourselves into every word we utter for God, even though we speak only to one poor ragged child.

At the same time let us cultivate a constant promptitude in this work.

We should be ready to give an answer to him that asketh us; we should be eager to seize opportunities; we should be on the watch for openings for advancing the great suit. Be always in trim for this great business.

When you leave home say to yourself, "I may have to speak for God in the omnibus, or in the workshop, in the parlour, or in the kitchen; I may have to speak on the behalf of God when least I expect it, let me have my heart in order for it." May the Holy Ghost enable you so to do. The mercy of the Lord to us never faileth, and let our zeal to honour him never cease.

Thus we have thought upon the subject, and I trust are prepared to enquire into the way in which we can show our practical interest in it. I can only give brief hints, and there is no need of more, for the work itself will open before you when you once get at it.

II. "I have yet to speak on God's behalf." Let us now consider HOW IT IS TO BE DONE. A great number of Christians will do it best by *manifesting holiness in their daily lives*; by their common conversation being seasoned with salt; and by taking such opportunities as the providence of God puts in their way of speaking to their Redeemer's praise. "I have yet to speak on God's behalf" as the master of a family to my children and to my servants, as a mistress to my domestics, as a servant by my life, as a merchant in my trade. I have so to speak on God's behalf that those about me may see what religion is by watching my life. Whatever my lot, condition, or occupation, I have a witness to bear; for those who never read the Bible may read me, and those who never think of Christ may at least think of one of his disciples, and see in some degree what the Master is by what the servant is. Let this object tone and tune your lives, my brothers and sisters; and let the members of this church especially bear in mind that they are bound from morning to night in all that they are and all that they do to be speaking on the behalf of God.

But, further, we are bound to do this by *giving instruction*. All of you who have been taught should also teach, and I am sure there is a great want of instruction in this age: instruction, I mean, upon the things of God. We have probably more present need of instruction than of exhortation. We have many who exhort, but few who edify. Do, dear friends, whether you teach in the Sunday-school, or stand up at the corner of the street, or talk with friends and comrades, try to make known the name and nature and attributes of God; show his claims, the perfect righteousness demanded by his law, and the penalties due to disobedience; speak on God's behalf of his gospel's freeness, fulness, and sureness; speak on God's behalf concerning the doctrine of his providence and the great truths of his grace and sovereignty. Do not let those around you die for lack of knowledge: make the name of the Lord to be known as much as lieth in you. All themes, if rightly regarded, point to God, and are best seen when he is our standpoint. There is a great need that we should be continually putting gospel truths in the sunlight of God, giving clear instruction to the sons of men in reference to the character, the work, the purposes, the will, the supremacy of God in

Christ Jesus ; for the Lord he is God, even he is God alone, and the whole earth shall yet know this. For this end we have yet to speak on God's behalf.

Thirdly, there is another way of doing this, namely, by *bearing personal testimony* to what you have known and felt and experienced of the good things of God. This is a very powerful way of speaking on God's behalf. Tell of your own sense of sin wrought in you by the Holy Ghost ; tell of your own delight in the pardoning blood ; tell of the power of prayer as proved by yourself ; tell of the reality of faith, and the fidelity of God to his promise ; and illustrate these by your own history. Perhaps you are too slow to do this, from alarm lest you should be thought egotistical. If Paul had never spoken of himself in his Epistles we should have been great losers, and I do not suppose that Paul would have been any the humbler for his silence. It is a mock humility, it is a detestable humility, which robs God of his glory because we are afraid somebody will criticise us if we spoke to his praise. Such a motive is sheer selfishness : it is base pride when a man, to make himself the better thought of, dares not say, " My God did this and that for me, and this and that by me, and unto him be praise." Bear your testimony in your homes, and tell your friends what great things God hath done for you. Say among the heathen, " The Lord hath done great things for us whereof we are glad." Be witnesses for the Lord in all companies.

Sometimes, too, we may have to bear our testimony by way of *controversy*. We are to contend earnestly for the faith. Have you not heard it said, " Why cannot a man preach his own views and let other people alone ? " Yes, why did not Luther do so ? Why did he not take the advice of Staupnitz when he said, " Go thou to thy cell and pray, and leave these matters to God, and hold thy tongue " ? Where had been the Reformation if he had followed that sage advice ? Could not Calvin have done so, and studied the decrees of God by himself, and have made made no war on Rome ? Where would have been the church of the present day ? It is an easy way to save your skin, to believe what you believe and let other people alone. Martyrs at the stake and confessors in prison were fools on the hypothesis that controversy is wrong. No, it is a part of our religion to let no error alone, to draw the sword and fight the good fight, warring against the many false spirits which have come into the world. If you ever hear severe criticisms upon bold and strong speeches which assail error, do not join in those criticisms. If you do, I do not know that those who are the victims of your remarks will care much about it, but you will be fighting on the wrong side, and that is an important point for you to think of. If you are wise you will let the Christian soldier war his warfare, and at the very least not oppose. Surely, if error is to have liberty, the truth ought not to be bound. Our " modern thought " men are the least liberal of all professors, their bigotry outbigots all that has gone before. They have a warm side for every error, but the old-fashioned orthodox gospel is sneered at, run down, and caricatured. Well, there is the end of the matter ; by God's grace we have believed, and what we have believed we hold fast, and this day again we lift up a banner because of the truth, and rejoice that we have yet to speak on God's behalf.

There is another way of speaking on God's behalf, and that is by

pleading with sinners, setting forth God's claims, urging them to accept God's gracious way of mercy, reminding them of God's right to our obedience, and of the demand of his justice that sin should be punished; setting before them the sovereignty of God, so that they shall admit that they have no claims upon his goodness, and urging them to yield to him and accept the grace which he so spontaneously gives. You can all do something of this; I pray you do a great deal more. During the late special services many of you have been diligent in speaking to strangers in the pews: keep up the custom, brethren. You used to do it years ago; renew the habit. Your hearts are warm, and your tongues have come into practice; go on, I pray you, as you have begun; say, each one, "I have permitted many to go in and out of the pew without a word for Christ; but it shall not be so again, for I have yet to speak on God's behalf."

III. My third head was, LET US DO IT, but I have no time to attempt it, except it be in the briefest fashion. I have to speak on behalf of God to those among you who are utterly *careless* about divine claims. How long will ye provoke the majesty of heaven? Hear, O heavens, and give ear O earth! The Lord hath nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against him. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but ye do not know him and do not consider." Are ye honest towards everybody but God? Will you consider everyone but your Maker? Do you cast an eye of love on all except the great Being who is love itself? Some of you have lived half a century, and yet have neglected all the claims of your God. I beseech you, recollect that the time will come when he will reckon with you, and call you to account. The talents committed to you have all been buried as yet: what will you say in that day when he shall call you to his bar? Oh, for God's sake, even if you leave out all considerations of your own eternal condition, by the common honesty which suggests that each one should have his own, I pray you turn your eyes to God and think upon his Christ.

I speak again on God's behalf to many who are *undecided*; and this is my message,—How long halt ye between two opinions? If God be God, serve him: if Baal be God, serve him. It is time that you should put an end to these hesitations, that the equivocal life which you are now leading should close in one way or the other. You said years ago that you were almost persuaded; you are no further now; you are worse, and will grow worse still; and in the end you will perish in your sin unless you come to a dead halt and consider your way, and acquaint yourself with God, and be at peace. Oh, I pray you hear the voice which cries to you to cease your wanderings and return unto your God.

I would speak to you *new converts* on the behalf of God just these few sentences. See to it that your conversion is true. Have no superficial religion. Pray God to plough you deep that there may be a sure harvest. Remember, if you get healed before you are wounded it will serve no useful purpose. Many a surgeon has filmed a wound and found that he has done more hurt than good. You must be killed before you can be made alive; you must be stripped before you can be clothed. See to it that you repent as well as believe the gospel, for a dry-eyed faith is not the faith of God's elect, and will not save you. Repent and be converted. Let sin be abhorred, lamented, and forsaken; then, with the precious blood of Christ to make you clean, go on your way rejoicing.

O you *new converts* who are to be brought into the church, I speak on God's behalf to you. I hope you will be better than your fathers, better far than some of us who have been a stiff-necked generation. I hope you will come in among us as plastic material, which the Lord Jesus will mould according to his will. I trust you will come into the church like firebrands, like coals of juniper which have a most vehement flame, that all of us may anew be set on fire. There are some of us, I will not say who, but each one may judge for himself, who are quite cold enough; O that their arctic hearts may become a torrid region: may the Lord warm the mass right through, that we may praise and bless his name.

And now, to you *Christians*, I have yet to speak on the behalf of God. Do you need I should? Do you love the Lord? Do you really love him? "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" Mary, Hannah, do you indeed love your Lord? Then what manner of persons ought we to be? What lives should love prompt us to lead? Come, let us gird our garments about us, and give ourselves up once again to his service, by whom we are brought nigh unto God. May the Holy Spirit come upon us in a sevenfold measure from this day forward, to the praise of the glory of his name who gives us the great privilege of saying, "I have yet to speak on God's behalf."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Job xxxvi.

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Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

OVER AGAINST THE SEPULCHRE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 24TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Sitting over against the sepulchre."—Matthew xxvii. 61.

MARY MAGDALENE and the other Mary were last at the Saviour's grave. They had associated themselves with Joseph and Nicodemus in the sad but loving task of placing the body of their Lord in the silent tomb, and after the holy men had gone home they lingered still near the grave. Sitting down, perhaps upon some seat in the garden, or on some projection of the rock, they waited in mournful solitude. They had seen where and how the body was laid, and so had done their utmost, but yet they sat watching still: love has never done enough, it is hungry to render service. They could scarcely take their eyes away from the spot which held their most precious treasure, nor leave till they were compelled to do so the sacred relics of their Best Beloved. The Virgin Mary had been taken by John to his own home. She had sustained too great a shock to remain at the tomb, for in her were fulfilled the words, "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own heart also." She was wise to leave to others those sorrowful offices which were beyond her own power; exceeding wise, also, from that hour to her life's end, to remain in the shade, modestly bearing the honour which made her blessed among women. The mother of Zebedee's children, who also lingered late at the tomb, was gone home too, for as she was the mother of John it is exceedingly probable that John resided with her, and had taken the Virgin to her home: hence she was needed at home to act as hostess and assist her son, and thus she would be obeying the last wish of her dying Lord when he said "Son, behold thy mother," and explained his meaning by a look. All having thus departed, the two Marys were the sole watchers at the tomb of Christ at the time of the going down of the sun. They had work yet to do for his burial, and this called them away, but they staid as long as they could—last to go and first to return.

This morning we shall with the women take up the somewhat unusual post of "sitting over against the sepulchre." I call it unusual, for as none remained save these two women, so few have preached upon our Redeemer's

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burial. Thousands of sermons have been delivered upon his death and resurrection, and in this I greatly rejoice, only wishing that there were thousands more ; but still the burial of our Lord deserves a larger share of consideration than it generally obtains. “ He was crucified, dead, *and buried*,” says the creed, and therefore those who wrote that summary must have thought his burial an important truth ; and so indeed it is. It was the natural sequence and seal of his death, and so was related to that which went before ; it was the fit and suitable preparation for his rising again, and so stood in connection with that which followed after. Come, then, let us take our seat with the holy women “ over against the sepulchre,” and sing—

“ Rest, glorious Son of God : thy work is done,
And all thy burdens borne ;
Rest on that stone till the third sun has brought
Thine everlasting morn.

“ How calmly in that tomb thou liest now,
Thy rest how still and deep !
O'er thee in love the Father rests : he gives
To his beloved sleep.

“ On Bethel pillow now thy head is laid,
In Joseph's rock-hewn cell ;
Thy watchers are the angels of thy God :
They guard thy slumbers well.”

I. Supposing ourselves to be sitting in the garden with our eyes fixed upon the great stone which formed the door of the tomb, we first of all **ADMIRE THAT HE HAD A GRAVE AT ALL.** We wonder how that stone could hide him who is the brightness of his Father's glory ; how the Life of all could lie among the dead ; how he who holds creation in his strong right hand could even for an hour be entombed. Admiring this, we would calmly reflect, first, upon *the testimony of his grave that he was really dead.* Those tender women could not have been mistaken, their eyes were too quick to suffer him to be buried alive, even if any one had wished to do so. Of our Lord's actual death we have many proofs connected with his burial. When Joseph of Arimathæa went to Pilate and begged the body, the Roman ruler would not give it up till he was certified of his death. The centurion, a man under authority, careful in all that he did, certified that Jesus was dead. The soldier who served under the centurion had by a very conclusive test established the fact of his death beyond all doubt, for with a spear he pierced his side, and forthwith there came out blood and water. Pilate, who would not have given up the body of a condemned person unless he was sure that execution had taken place, registered the death and commanded the body to be delivered to Joseph. Both Joseph of Arimathæa and Nicodemus and all the friends who aided in the interment were beyond all question convinced that he was dead. They handled the lifeless frame, they wrapped it in the bands of fine linen, they placed the spices about the sacred flesh which they loved so well : they were sadly assured that their Lord was dead. Even his enemies were quite certain that they had slain him : they never had a suspicion that possibly a little life remained in him, and that it could be revived, for their stern hate allowed no doubt to

remain upon that point, they knew even to the satisfaction of their mistrustful malice that Jesus of Nazareth had died. Even when in their anxiety they went to Pilate, it was not that they might obtain stronger proofs of death, but to prevent the disciples from stealing his dead body and giving out that he had risen from the dead. Yes, Jesus died, literally and actually died, and his body of flesh and bones was really laid in Joseph's grave. It was no phantom that was crucified, as certain heretics dreamed of old. We have not to look to a spectral atonement or to a ~~vain~~ ^{vain} sacrifice, though some in our own times would reduce redemption to ~~something~~ ^{something} shadowy and unsubstantial. Jesus was a real man, and truly ~~tasted~~ ^{tasted} the bitter pangs of death; and therefore he in very deed lay in the sepulchre, motionless as the rock out of which it was hewn, shrouded in his winding sheet. Remember as you think of your Lord's death that the day will come, unless the second advent should intervene, in which you and I shall lie low among the dead, as once our Master did. Soon to this heart there will be left ~~no~~ ^{no} pulsing life, to this eye no glance of observation, to this tongue no voice, to ~~this~~ ^{this} ear no sensibility of sound. We naturally start from this, yet must it be. We shall certainly mingle with the dust we tread upon and feed the worm. ~~But~~ ^{But} as we gaze on Jesus' tomb and assure ourselves that our great Lord and Master died each thought of dread is gone, and we no longer shudder: we feel that we can safely go where Christ has gone before.

Sitting down over against the sepulchre, after one has ruminated upon the wondrous fact that he who only hath immortality was numbered with the dead, the next subject which suggests itself is *the testimony of the grave to his union with us*. He had his grave hard by the city, and not on some lone mountain peak where foot of man could never tread. His grave was where it could be seen; it was a family grave which Joseph had no doubt prepared for himself and his household. Jesus was laid in a family vault where another had expected to lie. Where was Moses buried? No man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day. But where Jesus was buried was well known to his friends. He was not caught away in a chariot of fire, nor was it said of him that God took him, but he was laid in the grave, "as the manner of the Jews is to bury." Jesus found his grave amongst the men he had redeemed. Hard by the common place of execution there was a garden, and in that garden they laid him in a tomb which was meant for others; so that our Lord's sepulchre stands, as it were, among our homes and gardens, and is one tomb among many. Before me rises a picture. I see the cemetery, or sleeping place, of the saints, where each one rests on his lowly bed. They lie not alone, but like soldiers sleeping around their captain's pavilion, where he also spent the night, though he is up before them. The sepulchre of Jesus is the central grave of God's acre; it is empty now, but his saints lie buried all around that cave in the rock, gathered in ranks around their dear Redeemer's resting-place. Surely it robs the grave of its ancient terror when we think that Jesus slept in one of the chambers of the great dormitory of the sons of men.

Very much might be said about the tomb in which Jesus lay. It was a *new* tomb, wherein no remains had been previously laid, and thus if he came forth from it there would be no suspicion that another had arisen, nor could it be imagined that he rose through touching some old

prophet's bones, as he did who was laid in Elisha's grave. As he was born of a virgin mother, so was he buried in a virgin tomb, wherein never man had lain. It was a *rocky* tomb, and therefore nobody could dig into it by night, or tunnel through the earth. It was a *borrowed* tomb; so poor was Jesus that he owed a grave to charity; but that tomb was spontaneously offered, so rich was he in the love of hearts which he had won. That tomb he returned to Joseph, honoured unspeakably by his temporary sojourn therein. I know not whether Joseph ever used it for any of his house; but I see no reason why he ~~should~~ not have done so. Certainly, our Lord when he borrows ~~always~~ makes prompt repayment, and gives a bonus over: he filled Simon's boat with fish when he used it for a pulpit, and he sanctified the rocky cell wherein he had lodged, and left it ~~reserved~~ for the next who should sleep therein.

We, too, expect, unless special circumstances should intervene, that these bodies of ~~ours~~ will lie in their narrow beds beneath the green-sward, and ~~slumber~~ till the resurrection. Nor need we be afraid of the tomb, ~~for~~ Jesus has been there. Sitting over against his sepulchre we grow brave, and are ready, like knights of the holy sepulchre, to hurl defiance at death. At times we almost long for evening to undress that we may rest with God, in the chamber where he giveth to his beloved sleep.

Now, note that our Lord's tomb was in a garden; for this is typically *the testimony of his grave to the hope of better things*. Just a little beyond the garden wall you would see a little knoll, of grim name and character, the Tyburn of Jerusalem, Golgotha, the place of a skull, and there stood the cross. That rising ground was given up to horror and barrenness; but around the actual tomb of our Saviour there grew herbs and plants and flowers. A spiritual garden still blooms around his tomb; the wilderness and the solitary place are glad for him, and the desert rejoices and blossoms as the rose. He hath made another Paradise for us, and he himself is the sweetest flower therein. The first Adam sinned in a garden and spoiled our nature; the second Adam slept in a garden and restored our loss. The Saviour buried in the earth hath removed the curse from the soil; henceforth blessed is the ground for his sake. He died for us that we ourselves might become in heart and life fruitful gardens of the Lord. Let but his tomb, and all the facts which surround it, have due influence upon the minds of men, and this poor blighted earth shall again yield her increase: instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree, and it shall be to the Lord for a name.

Sitting over against the sepulchre perhaps the best thought of all is that now it is empty *and so bears testimony to our resurrection*. It must have made the two Marys weep, when before they left the grave they saw it filled with so beloved a treasure, so surely dead; they ought to have rejoiced to find it empty when they returned, but they knew not as yet the angel's message,—“He is not here, for he is risen.” Our Christ is not dead now; he ever liveth to make intercession for us. He could not be holden by the bands of death. There was nothing corruptible about him, and therefore his body has left the abode of decay to live in newness of life. The sepulchre is spoiled and the spoiler has gone up to glory, leading captivity captive. As you sit over against the sepulchre let your hearts be

comforted concerning death, whose sting is gone for ever. There shall be a resurrection. Be ye sure of this, for if the dead rise not then is Christ not risen ; but the Lord is risen indeed, and his rising necessitates that all who are in him should rise as he has done.

Yet another thought comes to me,—Can I follow Christ as fully as these two women did ? That is to say, can I still cling to him though to sense and reason his cause should seem dead and laid in a rocky sepulchre ? Can I like Joseph and Magdalene be a disciple of a dead Christ ? Could I follow him even at his lowest point ? I want to apply this practically. Times have come upon the Christian church when truth seems to be fallen in the streets, and the kingdom of Christ is in apparent peril. Just now the Lord Jesus is betrayed by not a few of his professed ministers. He is being crucified afresh in the perpetual attacks of scepticism against his blessed gospel ; and it may be things may wax worse and worse. This is not the first occasion when it has been so, for at various times in the history of the church of God his enemies have exulted, and cried out that the gospel of past ages was exploded, and might be reckoned as dead and buried. For one I mean to sit over against the very sepulchre of truth. I am a disciple of the old-fashioned doctrine as much when it is covered with obloquy and rebuke as when it shall again display its power, as it surely shall. Sceptics may seem to take truth and bind it, and scourge it, and crucify it, and say that it is dead, and they may endeavour to bury it in scorn, but the Lord has many a Joseph and a Nicodemus who will see honour done even to the body of truth, and will wrap the despised creed in sweet spices, and hide it away in their hearts. They may, perhaps, be half afraid that it is really dead, as the wise men assert, yet it is precious to their souls, and they will come forth right gladly to espouse its cause, and to confess that they are its disciples. We will sit down in sorrow but not in despair, and watch until the stone is rolled away, and Christ in his truth shall live again, and be openly triumphant. We shall see a divine interposition and shall cease to fear ; while they who stand armed to prevent the resurrection of the grand old doctrine shall quake and become as dead men, because the gospel's everlasting life has been vindicated, and they are made to quail before the brightness of its glory.

This, then, is our first meditation : we admire that Jesus ever had a grave, and we sit in wonder over against the sepulchre.

II. Secondly, sitting here, WE REJOICE IN THE HONOURS OF HIS BURIAL. The burial of Christ was, under some aspects of it, the lowest step of his humiliation : he must not merely for a moment die, but he must be buried awhile in the heart of the earth. On the other hand, under other aspects our Lord's burial was the first step of his glory : it was a turning-point in his great career, as we shall hope to show you. Our Lord's body was given up by Pilate to Joseph, and he went with authority to receive it from those who were appointed to see him take it down. I yesterday had a glimpse at a work of art by one of our own Lambeth neighbours, exhibited by Mr. Doulton ; it is a fine piece of work in terra-cotta, representing the taking down of Christ from the cross. I could have wished to have studied it more at leisure, but a mere glimpse has charmed me. The artist represents a Roman soldier at the top of the cross taking down the parchment upon which the accusation was

written; he is rolling it up to put it away for ever. I thought of the taking away of the handwriting which was against *him*, even as he had taken away that which was against *us*. The Roman soldier by authority is thus represented as removing the charge which was once nailed over the ever blessed head; there is no accusation against him now: he died, and the law is satisfied, it can no longer accuse the man who has endured its penalty. Another soldier is represented with a pair of pincers drawing out one of the big nails from the hands; the sacred body is free now, law has no further claims upon it, and withdraws its nails. A disciple, not a soldier, has mounted a ladder on the other side, and with a pair of scissors is cutting away the crown of thorns; and I think the artist did well to represent his doing so, for henceforth it is our delight to remove all shame from the name of Jesus, and to crown him in another fashion. Then the artist has represented certain of his disciples as gently taking hold of the body as it is gradually being unloosed by the soldiers, while Joseph of Arimathæa stands there with his long linen sheet ready to receive him. Jars of precious myrrh and spices are standing there, and the women ready to open the lids and to place the spices around the holy flesh. Every part of the design is significant and instructive, and the artist deserves great praise for it: it brought before my mind the descent from the cross with greater vividness than any painting I have ever seen. The nails are all extracted, he is held no longer to the cross, the body is taken down, no longer to be spit upon, and despised, and rejected, but tenderly handled by his friends; for all and everything that has to do with shame, and suffering, and paying of penalty is ended once for all. What became of the cross of wood? You find in Scripture no further mention of it. The legends concerning it are all false upon the face of them. The cross is gone for ever; neither gibbet, nor nail, nor spear, nor thorny crown can be found; there is no further use for them. Jesus our Lord has gone to his glory; for by his one sacrifice he hath secured the salvation of his own.

But now as to his burial. Beloved, there were many honourable circumstances about it. Its first effect was *the development of timid minds*. Joseph of Arimathæa occupied a high post as an honourable councillor, but he was a secret disciple. Nicodemus, too, was a ruler of the Jews, and though he had spoken a word for the Master now and then, as probably Joseph had done (for we are told that he had not consented to their counsel and deed), yet he had never come out boldly till now. He came to Jesus by night aforetime, but he came by daylight now. At the worst estate of the Saviour's cause we should have thought that these two men would remain concealed, but they did not. Now that the case seemed desperate, they show their faith in Jesus and pluck up courage to honour their Lord. Lambs become lions when the Lamb is slain. Joseph went boldly in unto Pilate and begged the body of Jesus. For a dead Christ he risks his position, and even his life, for he is asking the body of a reputed traitor, and may himself be put to death by Pilate; or else the members of the Sanhedrim may be enraged at him, and bind themselves with an oath that they will slay him for paying honour to the Nazarene, whom they called "that deceiver." Joseph can venture everything for Jesus, even though he knows him to be dead. Equally brave is Nicodemus; for publicly at the foot of the cross he

stands with his hundred pounds weight of spices, caring nothing for any who may report the deed. I cheerfully hope, dear brethren, that one result of the ferocious attacks made upon the gospel at this time will be that a great number of quiet and retiring spirits will be roused to energy and courage. Such works of evil might move the very stones to cry out. While, perhaps, some who have spoken well in other days and have usually done the battling may be downcast and quiet, these who have kept in the rear rank, and have only in secret followed Jesus, will be brought to the front, and we shall see men of substance and of position avowing their Lord. Joseph and Nicodemus both illustrate the dreadful truth that it is hard for them that have riches to enter into the kingdom of God; but they also show us that when they do enter they frequently excel. If they come last they remain to the last. If cowards when others are heroes, they can also be heroes when even apostles are cowards. Each man has his turn, and so while the fishermen-apostles were hiding away, the wealthy non-committal brethren came to the front: though bred in luxury, they bore the brunt of the storm, and avowed the cause whose leader lay dead. Brave are the hearts which stand up for Jesus in his burial. "Sitting over against the sepulchre," we draw comfort from the sight of the friends who honoured the Lord in his death.

I like to remember that the burial of the Lord *displayed the union of loving hearts*. The tomb became the meeting-place of the old disciples and the new, of those who had long consorted with the Master, and those who had but newly avowed him. Magdalene and Mary had been with the Lord for years, and had ministered to him of their substance; but Joseph of Arimathæa, as far as his public avowal of Christ is concerned, was, like Nicodemus, a new disciple: old and new followers united in the deed of love, and laid their Master in the tomb. A common sorrow and a common love unite us wondrously. When our great Master's cause is under a cloud and his name blasphemed it is pleasant to see the young men battling with the foe and aiding their fathers in the stern struggle. Magdalene with her penitent love, and Mary with her deep attachment to her Lord, join with the rabbi and the counsellor who now begin to prove that they intensely love the Man of Nazareth. That small society, that little working meeting, which gathered around our Master's body, was a type of the whole Christian church. When once aroused, believers forget all differences and degrees of spiritual condition, and each one is eager to do his part to honour his Lord.

Mark, too, that the Saviour's death *brought out abundant liberality*. The spices, one hundred pounds in weight, and the fine linen, were furnished by the men; and then the holy women prepared the liquid spices with which to carry out what they might have called his great funeral, when they would more completely wrap the body in odoriferous spices as the manner of the Jews was to bury. There was much of honour intended by all that they brought. A very thoughtful writer observes that the clothes in which our Lord was wrapped are not called grave-clothes but linen-clothes, and that the emphasis would seem to be put upon their being linen; and he reminds us that when we read of the garments of the priests in the Book of the Law we find that every garment must be of linen. Our Lord's priesthood is, therefore, suggested by the sole use of

linen for his death robes. The Apostle and High Priest of our profession in his tomb slept in pure white linen, even as now to-day he represents himself to his servants as clothed with a garment down to the foot. Even after death he acted as a priest, and poured out a libation of blood and water; and it was, therefore, meet that in the grave he should still wear priestly garments.

“He made his grave with the wicked,”—there was his shame; “but with the rich in his death,”—there was his honour. He was put to death by rough soldiery, but he was laid in his grave by tender women. Persons of honourable estate helped gently to receive, and reverentially to place in its position his dear and sacred frame; and then, as if to do him honour, though they meant it not, his tomb must not be left unsentinelled, and Cæsar lends his guards to watch the couch of the Prince of Peace. Like a king he slumbers, till as the King of kings he wakes at daybreak.

To my mind it is very pleasant to see all this honour come to our Lord when he is in his worst estate,—dead and buried. Will we not also honour our Lord when others despise him? Will we not cleave to him, come what may? If the church were all but extirpated, if every voice should go over to the enemy, if a great stone of philosophic reasoning were rolled at the door of truth, and it should seem no longer possible for argument to remove it, yet would we wait till the gospel should rise again to confound its foes. We will not be afraid, but keep our position; we will stand still and see the salvation of God, or “sitting over against the sepulchre,” we will watch for the Lord’s coming. Let the worst come to the worst we would sooner serve Christ while he is conceived to be dead than all the philosophers that ever lived when in their prime. Even if fools should dance over the grave of Christianity there shall remain at least a few who will weep over it, and brushing away their tears from their eyes expect to see it revive, and put forth all its ancient strength.

III. I must now pass to a third point. While sitting over against the sepulchre WE OBSERVE THAT HIS ENEMIES WERE NOT AT REST. They had their own way, but they were not content; they had taken the Saviour, and with wicked hands they had crucified and slain him; but they were not satisfied. They were the most uneasy people in the world, though they had gained their point. It was their Sabbath day, and it was a high day, that Sabbath of Sabbaths, the Sabbath of the Passover. They kept a preparation for it and had been very careful not to go into the place called the pavement, lest they should defile themselves—sweet creatures! And now have they not gained all they wanted? They have killed Jesus and buried him: are they not happy? No: and what is more, their humiliation had begun—they were doomed to belie their own favourite profession. What was that profession? Their boast of rigid Sabbath-keeping was its chief point, and they were perpetually charging our blessed Lord with Sabbath-breaking, for healing the sick, and even because his disciples rubbed a few ears of wheat between their hands when they were hungry on the Sabbath-day. Brethren, look at these men and laugh at their hypocrisy. It is the Sabbath-day, and they come to Pilate, holding counsel on the Sabbath with a heathen! They tell him that they are afraid that Jesus’ body will be spirited away, and he says, “Ye have a watch; go your way, make it as sure as you can”; and they go and seal the stone on the Sabbath. O ye

hypocritical Pharisees, here was an awful breaking of your Sabbath by **y**our own selves! According to their superstitious tradition the rubbing **of** ears of wheat between the hands was a kind of threshing, and therefore it was a breach of the law; surely, by the same reasoning the burning **of** a candle to melt the wax must have been similar to the lighting of a **f**urnace, and the melting of wax must have been a kind of foundry work, **l**ike that of the smith who pours metal into a mould; for in such a **r**idiculous fashion their rabbis interpreted the smallest acts. But they **h**ad to seal the stone and break their own absurd laws to satisfy their **r**estless malice. One is pleased to see either Pharisees or Sadducees made **t**o overturn their own professions and lay bare their hypocrisy. Modern-**t**hought gentlemen will, ere long, be forced to the same humiliation.

Next, they had to retract their own accusation against our Lord. **T**hey charged Jesus with having said, "Destroy this temple, and I will build it in three days"; pretending that he referred to the temple upon **Z**ion. Now they come to Pilate and tell him, "This deceiver said, after three days I will rise again." Oh, ye knaves, that is your new version, **i**s it? Ye put the man to death for quite another rendering! Now you understand the dark saying? Yes, ye deceivers, and ye understood it before; but now ye must eat your leek, and swallow your own words. Truly, he scorneth the scorers, and poureth contempt upon his enemies.

And now see how these kill-Christ^s betray their own fears. He is dead, but they are afraid of him! He is dead, but they cannot shake off the dread that he will vanquish them yet. They are full of agitation and alarm.

Nor was this all, they were to be made witnesses for God,—to sign certificates of the death and resurrection of his Anointed. In order that there might be no doubt about the resurrection at all, there must be a seal, and *they* must go and set it; there must be a guard, and *they* must see it mustered. The disciples need not trouble about certifying that Jesus is in the grave, these Jews will do it, and set their own great seal to the evidence. These proud ones are sent to do drudges' work in Christ's kitchen, to wait upon a dead Christ, and to protect the body which they had slain. The lie which they told afterwards crowned their shame: they bribed the soldiers to say that his disciples stole him away while they slept; and this was a transparent falsehood; for if the soldiers were asleep how could they know what was done? We cannot conceive of an instance in which men were more completely made to contradict and convict themselves. That Sabbath was a high day, but it was no Sabbath to them, nor would the overthrow of the gospel be any rest of soul to its opponents. If ever we should live to see the truth pushed into a corner, and the blessed cause of Christ fastened up as with rationalistic nails, and its very heart pierced by a critic's spear; yet, mark you, even in the darkest night that can ever try our faith, the adversaries of the gospel will still be in alarm lest it should rise again. The old truth has a wonderful habit of leaping up from every fall as strong as ever. In Dr. Doddridge's days men had pretty nearly buried the gospel. Socinianism was taught in many if not most dissenting pulpits, and the same was true of the Church of England: the liberal thinkers dreamed that they had won the victory and extinguished evangelical teaching; but their shouting came a little too soon. They said, "We shall hear no

more of this miserable justification by faith, and regeneration by the Holy Ghost." They laid the gospel in a tomb cut out in the cold rock of Unitarianism, and they set the seal of their learning upon the great stone of doubt which shut in the gospel. There it was to lie for ever; but God meant otherwise. There was a pot-boy over in Gloucester called George Whitefield, and there was a young student who had lately gone to Oxford called John Wesley, and these two passed by the grave of the gospel and beheld a strange sight, which they began to tell; and as they told it, the sods of unbelief and the stones of learned criticism began to move, and the truth which had been buried started up with Pentecostal power. Aha! ye adversaries, how greatly had ye deceived yourselves! Within a few months all over England the work of the devil and his ministers was broken to pieces, as when a tower is split by lightning, or the thick darkness scattered by the rising sun. The weight of ignorance and unbelief fled before the bright day of the gospel, though that gospel was for the most part proclaimed by unlettered men. The thing which has been is the thing which shall be. History repeats itself. O generation of modern thinkers, you will have to eat your own words, and disprove your own assertions. You will have to confute each other and yourselves, even as the Moabites and Elamites slew each other. It may even happen that your infidelities will work themselves out into practical evil of which you will be the victims. You may bring about a repetition of the French Revolution of 1789, with more than all its bloodshed, and who will wonder. You, some of you calling yourselves ministers of God, with your insinuations of doubt, your denials of future punishment, your insults of the gospel, your ingenious speeches against the Bible, are shaking the very foundation of society. I impeach you as the worst enemies of mankind. In effect you proclaim to men that they may sin as they like, for there is no hell, or if there be, it is but a little one: thus you publish a gospel of licentiousness, and you may one day rue the result. You may live to see a reign of terror of your own creating, but even if you do, the gospel of Jesus will come forth from all the filth you have heaped upon it, for the holy gospel will live as Christ lives, and its enemies shall never cease to be in fear. Your harsh speeches against those who preach the gospel, your bitterness and your sneers of contempt, all show that you know better than you say, and are afraid of the very Christ whom you kill. We who cleave to the glorious gospel will abide in peace, come what may, but you will not.

IV. And now our last thought is that while these enemies of Christ were in fear and trembling **WE NOTE THAT HIS FOLLOWERS WERE RESTING.** It was the seventh day, and therefore they ceased from labour. The Marys waited, and Joseph and Nicodemus refrained from visiting the tomb; they obediently observed the Sabbath rest. I am not sure that they had faith enough to feel very happy, but they evidently did

expect something, and anxiously awaited the third day. They had enough of the comfort of hope to remain quiet on the seventh day.

Now, beloved, sitting over against the sepulchre while Christ lies in it, my first thought about it is, *I will rest, for he rests*. What a wonderful stillness there was about our Lord in that rocky grave. He had been daily thronged by thousands: even when he ate bread they disturbed him. He scarce could have a moment's stillness in life; but now how quiet is his bed! Not a sound is heard. The great stone shuts out all noise, and the body is at peace. Well, if he rests, I may. If for a while the Lord seems to suspend his energies, his servants may cry unto him, but they may not fret. He knows best when to sleep and when to wake.

As I see the Christ resting in the grave, my next thought is, *he has the power to come forth again*. Some few months ago I tried to show you that when the disciples were alarmed because Jesus was asleep they were in error, for his sleep was the token of their security. When I see a captain on board ship pacing anxiously up and down the deck, I may fear that danger is suspected; but when the captain turns into his cabin, then I may be sure that all is right, and there is no reason why I should not turn in too. So if our blessed Lord should ever suffer his cause to droop, and if he should give no marvellous manifestations of his power, we need not doubt his power; let us keep our Sabbath, pray to him, and work for him, for these are duties of the holy day of rest; but do not let us fret and worry, for his time to work will come.

The rest of the Christian lies in believing in Christ under all circumstances. Go in for this, beloved. Believe in him in the manger, when his cause is young and weak. Believe in him in the streets, when the populace applaud him, for he deserves their loudest acclamations. Believe in him when they take him to the brow of the hill to cast him headlong, he is just as worthy as when they cry "Hosanna." Believe in him when he is in an agony, and believe in him when he is on the cross; and if ever it should seem to you that his cause must die out, believe in him still. Christ's gospel in any circumstances deserves our fullest trust. That gospel which has saved your souls, that gospel which ye have received, and which has been sealed upon your hearts by the Holy Ghost, stand fast in it, come what may, and through faith peace and quiet shall pervade your souls.

Once more, it will be well if we can obtain peace by having fellowship with our Lord in his burial. Die with him, and be buried with him; there is nothing like it. I desire for my soul while she lives in the Lord that, as to the world and all its wisdom, I may be as a dead man. When accused of having no power of thought, and no originality of teaching, I am content to own the charge, for my soul desires to be dead to all but that which is revealed and taught by the Lord Jesus. I would lie in the rocky tomb of the everlasting truth, not creating thought, but giving

myself up to God's thoughts. But, brethren, if we are ever to lie in that tomb, we must be wrapped about with the fine linen of holiness : these are the shrouds of a man who is dead to sin. All about us must be the spices, the myrrh, and aloes of preserving grace, that being dead with Christ we may see no corruption, but may show that death to be only another form of the new life which we have received in him. When the world goes by, let it know concerning our heart's desire and ambition, that they are all buried with Christ, and it is written on the memorial of our spiritual grave, "Here he lies ;" as far as this world's sin, and pleasure, and self-seeking, and wisdom are concerned, "Here he lies buried with his Master."

Know, you who are not converted, that the way of salvation is by believing in Christ, or trusting in him, and if you do so trust you shall never be confounded, world without end, for he that trusteth Christ, and believeth in him even as a little child, the same shall enter into his kingdom, and he that will follow him, even down to his grave, shall be with him in his glory, and shall see his triumphs for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew xxvii. 44—61 ; Mark xv. 42—47 ; Luke xxiii. 50—56 ; John xix. 38—42 ; Romans vi. 1—13.

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A DISTINCTION WITH A DIFFERENCE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this?"—Luke i. 18.

"Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be?"—Luke i. 34.

ZACHARIAS and the Virgin Mary were both very dear to God, and therefore highly honoured and greatly favoured. The points of likeness between them are many. They were both persons of eminent character, for Zacharias walked in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless, and Mary was equally gracious and devout. They were both visited by an angel, and were both favoured with the prediction of a marvellous birth. Their answers to the angel are our two texts, and at first sight they seem to be alike. One does not see much less of faith or of unbelief in the one than in the other at first reading them, and yet Zacharias was blamed and chastened by being made dumb for a season, while the Virgin was indulged with an explanation, and was afterwards praised by the Holy Spirit, who spake through her cousin Elizabeth, and said, "Blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord." It appears very clear then that God can see differences where we see none; and though two persons may act very much alike, and from their lips may fall similar expressions, yet their temper and spirit may be widely different. Where you and I would put them together and say, "They are alike," God sees a difference; for while we judge sights and sounds the Lord weigheth the spirits. You must have noticed this in other parts of God's word. I will give you two instances in the life of Abraham. Lot was commanded not to look towards Sodom, and his wife after looking to Sodom was turned into a pillar of salt; and yet that morning Abraham gat up early to the place where he was wont to meet with the Lord and it is specially recorded that he looked toward Sodom. The very thing which Lot must not do Abraham may do. It is the same action; but then, if you think a moment, you can clearly see that the looking back of Lot would mean a lingering desire to return, but the look of Abraham had nothing of that

kind in it, and could have no evil significance. He was simply looking to the burning cities and admiring with solemn awe the justice of the Most High as he saw the heavens ruddy with flame and afterwards dark with dense clouds, while the smoke went up like the smoke of a furnace. The action was the same externally, but widely different in reality; and the Lord God does not so much regard our outward acts as the motives which direct them and the spirit in which they are performed.

Perhaps a more remarkable instance is that of Abraham and his wife Sarah. When they each received a distinct promise of the birth of Isaac it is said that Abraham fell upon his face and laughed, and then we read a little farther on, "Sarah laughed within herself." We never find that Abraham was censured for laughing. He laughed rightly. It was the natural expression of a wondering and amazed delight. It was holy laughter, and he was not censured nor called to account for it; but the Lord said unto him, "Wherefore did Sarah laugh?" Sarah was censured for doing the very thing which in Abraham was quite right, and did not need to be corrected. They both laughed: the one was right, but the other was wrong. Wherefore? Because there was a vital difference between them. Sarah's was the laugh of unbelief: she thought it could not be that at her age she should bear a child, her lord being old also. She laughed at the very idea; it seemed altogether too absurd; the mere notion struck her as being perfectly ridiculous, and though a devout woman she somewhat forgot the reverence due to him who gave the promise, and she laughed, though in a subdued and quiet way, "within herself." Abraham believed that the divine promise would be performed, and his was the laugh of joy to think that he should see a son born to his beloved Sarah, who should be his heir and the inheritor of the covenant. His soul danced within him with delight, because he believed what the Lord had spoken. Yet the two actions outwardly are so exactly similar that if you condemn one you think you must condemn the other, but God does not, since he sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.

We may apply this great truth to ourselves. We all sang the same hymn just now to the same tune, and yet from one it may have been to God's ear music and from another mockery. We closed our eyes just now and bowed our heads in prayer, and anyone looking upon us might have supposed us to be all equally accepted, but the Lord knows in whose case the heart was wandering upon the mountains of vanity and in whose case the soul with all its powers was crying out unto the living God. Judge yourselves, beloved, but never judge yourselves according to the sight of the eyes, and never be satisfied with yourselves because externally everything is correct—because you have passed through the routine of religion and attended to the machinery of the outward form. Do not be contented with postures, sounds, and looks—the soul is the soul of the matter. Look at the heart and cry to God also that he would search you, and make you clean in the secret parts, and in the hidden parts make you to know wisdom; else may you stand as God's people do, and go in and out of the house of prayer even as the brightest of the saints do, and never be separated from them until the trumpet rings out

the great tremendous day and you are sent to the left with the goats to be withered by a curse, while his people on his right hand shall receive the blessing for ever. Let us all remember that there may be an external similarity in apparent right or wrong, and yet there may be an inward and a real dissimilarity; for it is the inward that is the real, and not the outward, and the great Judge will search and try and separate between the precious and the vile, though the vile may seem to be more beautiful than the precious genuine diamond.

But now, leaving the general principle, I invite you, dear friends, to come back to my texts, and accompany me in looking at these two persons to see whether there is not a difference perceptible by ourselves; and I think we shall find a great deal more diversity than we had expected. I cannot work out the whole matter in one sermon, but some prominent points will I hope interest and profit you.

I. First let us take the case of ZACHARIAS, who said, "WHEREBY SHALL I KNOW THIS?"

And notice, to begin with, that supposing the two expressions of Zacharias and Mary had been identical, and supposing that they had conveyed the same thoughts, yet if they had both been wrong, Zacharias would have been the more faulty of the two, for *he was a priest*—a man set apart by office to study the word of God and to draw peculiarly near to God on his own account and for the people; while Mary was simply a humble village maid. Mary, it is true, was of royal descent, but her family had fallen into obscurity. She was a person of superior mind, but she held no office that could distinguish her from others. Zacharias being a priest was bound to act with a higher degree of faith than Mary, the lowly maiden. The priest's lips should keep knowledge and teach many. Were not the priests set apart to be instructors of the people, helpers of those that are weak, and guides of those who are ignorant and out of the way? They should therefore in all things set an example. If Mary had been unbelieving and Zacharias unbelieving, and both unbelieving to the same extent, yet in Zacharias it would have been much worse, because his very office called upon him to display greater grace than the humble maiden. Brethren and sisters, may I not apply this to myself and to you? Brother ministers, if we are unbelieving, we in our unbelief do not sin so cheaply as our people: we have more time to study the word, and therefore we have, or ought to have, more acquaintance with it. We are more familiar with divine things, and ought to be more richly filled with their faith-creating spirit. If the Lord has been pleased to make us under-shepherds over his people, we are bound to be ensamples to the flock. Our high position demands of us the exhibition of a greater degree of grace than we can expect from common believers, who are God's dear people, but are not set apart to be leaders. The same line of argument will apply in due proportion to each servant of our Lord Jesus: according to their measure of grace more is expected of some than of others. You, dear sisters, who teach young people should remember that they watch you, and they expect to see in you a bright example; and, what is more, God, who has placed you in the position of teachers, or of mothers, intends that there should be in you, by his grace, something that others may look up to, that the young beginners may learn from you. Take

heed that they never learn unbelief from your doubtings. Let them never see in you that worry, that anxiety, that fretfulness, which denotes the absence of a calm reliance upon God, but let them, whatever they gather from you, learn that which is worth knowing. And what can be a better lesson than that of faith in God? You who are in the church, dear friends, preachers, elders, deacons, and instructors of others, do see to it, that your lives and words do not breed unbelief. Especially do I speak to myself upon this point, for, being much exercised in spirit, I tremble lest I should suggest to any of you doubts and fears, or encourage you in them. Let those of us who are guides of others see to it that we do not dishonour God by mistrust and questioning, for unbelief in us is a glaring fault, and God will surely visit it upon us, even if he winks at it in the weak ones of the flock.

Again, in Zacharias' case it was not merely his office that distinguished him, but he was *a man of years*. We read that both himself and his wife were "well stricken in years." Now, a man who has had a long experience of the things of God—a man of prayer who has had many answers—a man of trouble who has had many deliverances—a man who has seen the hand of God with him in a long journey through the wilderness of life—is expected by God to exhibit a far stronger faith than the young people who have but lately learned his name. I speak to many here who are by far my seniors, of whom I may say that they were in Christ before me, and they must pardon my saying that they should have more faith than I by reason of their years of constant experience of the Lord's faithfulness and truth; and I, too, who have known the Lord for now a considerable number of years, must never put myself down with those who were converted during the last few months and say that I am to have no more faith than they. Shame upon every one of us if every day does not bring us fresh motives for believing in our Lord. Every hour, indeed, should be fraught with arguments for a more complete childlike trust in him. What, dear sister, did the Lord help you in such and such a strait? And do you not remember that you said, "I shall never doubt him any more"? And yet you have done so. Ah, how grievous must those doubts be to your gracious Lord! I know you thought you would never be delivered at one time, but you were mercifully lifted up from the depths; out of six troubles you have been rescued, and in seven no evil has touched you; and now that a fresh trial is come will you not believe your God? Well, if you do not, you will certainly incur very grievous sin and vex the Holy Spirit of God much more than your poor little sister Mary would do if, having only lately known the Saviour, she should distrust him in her first conflicts. Babies in grace should not doubt, but if they do their unbelief is not so wilful as that of fathers in Israel. If standard-bearers faint it is a sad calamity, and the faintness of poor wounded common soldiers is far less to be deplored. When aged Zacharias errs in this matter he is more to be blamed than youthful Mary.

Those two points are pretty clear, are they not?

Furthermore, let us observe that Zacharias had made *the birth of a child a subject of prayer*, which, I suppose, had not so much as been thought of by Mary. Beyond the fact that it was the usual desire of all

Hebrew women that they might be the mother of the Messias, the Virgin had probably never cast a single thought in the direction in which the angel's salutation conducted her; assuredly she had never made it a subject of prayer, but Zacharias had rightly done so. Read the thirteenth verse, "The angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias, for thy prayer is heard, and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son." And yet, though the promise came as a distinct and manifest answer to his prayers, Zacharias asked, "Whereby shall I know this?" Now, this was wrong: it was very wrong. He had been praying for it, and when it came he did not believe in it. Ah, Zacharias, you are verily guilty here. If it had come as a surprise altogether, as it did to Mary, there would be some excuse for your doubt; but when it is a reply to your own entreaties, a gracious yielding to intense requests, your unbelieving question is a grievous fault. If, when taken by surprise, Mary had doubted, it would have appeared natural, but for you, Zacharias,—for you to whom the angel said, "Thy prayer is heard"—how dost thou doubt about it now? Astonishment at answered prayers is amazement at divine truthfulness, and what is that but a low idea of the Lord unintentionally discovering itself. Yet I have sometimes thought that, if the Lord wished to surprise his own servants, all he would have to do would be to answer their prayers. He does so answer them continually, and in consequence you hear one and another say, "Is it not surprising? You see, we met and had a prayer meeting for a certain blessing, and the Lord has answered our supplications. How marvellous!" And yet if you sit down in a friend's house, do his children try to astonish you by mentioning cases in which their father kept his word? Do they dwell with amazement upon his having spoken the truth? Yet I could wish that the Lord's children would even get as far as that. Alas, they even overlook the majority of the facts which prove his veracity, and treat his faithfulness slightly. When his people are in a better frame than usual they admit his faithfulness, and mention as a great wonder that he heard prayer and fulfilled his word. Should this be so? Has it come to pass that it is a wonder for God to hear prayer? Have we fallen into such a low state of heart that we think his truthfulness to be a surprising thing? It were far better if we were of the same mind as a good old lady who, when some one said, "Is it not wonderful?" replied, "Well, it is one way, but it is not another, *for it is just like him—just like him.*" We may well be surprised at the tenderness of his great mercy, but not as though it were a novelty for God to do good and to keep his promise by regarding his people's cries. Dear brothers and sisters, we ought to be surprised if the Lord did *not* hear us, seeing that he is the true and faithful, prayer-hearing God. When you and I have had a matter heavily laid upon our hearts, and have been before God with it again and again, as doubtless Zacharias had, we should be looking out for our Lord's gracious reply. Do we not expect answers to letters which we write to our friends? Why do we not in like fashion expect replies to prayer? If God answers us are we to be so doubtful in mind as even to question the truthfulness of the blessing? If so we shall be manifestly guilty. If the Lord sends us a mercy in reply to our requests, and we do not believe it, but say, "Whereby shall I know this?" then our unbelief has a peculiar degree

of provocation in it, and we may expect to be chastened for it. This was the case with Zacharias.

The next point about Zacharias is that *he doubted the fact* which was announced by the angel in the name of the Lord. He said, "Whereby shall I know this?" Mary did not doubt the fact: she wished to know how it could be, but she believed it would be. She believed, for it was said of her, "Blessed is she that believed." But this good man did not believe, for the angel said to him, "Thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season." Now, beloved, when it comes to this, that we dare to doubt the promise of God, is it not a very grievous crime? If your child—your own child—whom you have loved so long and treated so tenderly should fall into a state of mind in which he did not believe *you*, his own father, would you not feel it to be peculiarly grievous? If you were conscious of nothing but love to him, if you were sure that throughout his life you had never broken a promise to him, but had always been as good as your word, if you had repeated your promise again and again, and he still said, "Father, I wish I could believe you," would you not be cut to the heart by such a declaration? The more earnestly he expressed regret at his inability to believe you, the more intense would be your pain. What an awful speech for a son to address to a father—"I wish I could believe you"! You would grieve in spirit and say inwardly, "What does my boy think of me? What has come over my child that he cannot believe me? It was not an enemy, then I could have borne it; but it is my child whom I love who says, not only that he does not believe me, but that he would do so if he could, and finds himself unable to think me true. He speaks in deep earnest, and thus I see how thoroughly the cruel feeling possesses him, and how desperate is the evil which leads him to mistrust my love." Ah, beloved, I leave your own thoughts, as I must just now leave mine, to peer into the depths of sin which must lie in what we sometimes talk of so flippantly, namely, doubts and fears. They are not the trifles which some men dream them to be: they are hideous profanities of sacred truth, revolting libels upon immaculate goodness, horrid blasphemies of infinite love! Shall the good God be thus assailed? Shall his own children thus ill-use him? Your child might doubt you, and it might be a trifle to him, but it would be death to you, his father or mother. You would feel it keenly; and so you may think that doubts and fears are trifles, but your heavenly Father does not think so; unbelief wounds him and grieves his Spirit. Hear what the Lord says: "How long will it be ere they believe me?" Forget not the apostle's warning in the third chapter of the Hebrews. "With whom was he grieved forty years? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?" Zacharias did not believe, and he had to smart for it, as you and I shall if we, when we see a promise written clearly in God's word, and evidently quite adapted to our case, nevertheless say, "Whereby shall I know this?"

Yet further. The good man Zacharias—for, remember, I am not doubting his grace, but on the contrary I began by saying that he was a very gracious and eminently godly man, probably much better than any of us, and possibly in some respects even more gracious than Mary herself, having a deeper experience, a fuller knowledge, greater courage,

and many other superior gifts and graces, although in this point he failed : he doubted his Lord ; and showed his unbelief by *asking for a sign*, "Whereby shall I know this?" He wanted a sign or a token that what the angel spake was true. This was not the case with Mary, who sought an explanation but not a token. Is it wrong, then, to ask for a token? Assuredly not in all cases, for it may even be sinful not to ask for one, as in the case of Ahaz, of whom we read, "Moreover the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God ; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord. And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David ; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?" In the case of Ahaz it was sinful to refuse, and in that of Zacharias sinful to request. Here again I must come back to the remark I started with, and remind you that the same thing may be right in one man and wrong in another, according to the motive. It is very curious that Abraham used almost identical words with Zacharias, when he said, "Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit this land?" He distinctly asked the Lord for a sign, nor was the request at all grievous to the Lord, for he knew that his servant Abraham asked that sign in all humility and childlike faith. Let me show you at once the difference between Abraham and Zacharias. Zacharias will not believe without a sign : Abraham has already believed, and waited long for the fulfilment of the promise, and feels that a sign would be comforting to him. It could in no sense have been said to the great father of the faithful, "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe," but some such rebuke might have been directed towards Zacharias. There was conspicuous faith in Abraham, and the desire for a token was natural rather than sinful. So was it with Gideon, who asked for many signs. You see at the very first that Gideon believes, and he acts upon his faith ; but he trembles because his faith is weak, and he asks for signs to strengthen his confidence ; indeed, he did not distrust the Lord at all, but only questioned whether it was the Lord who spoke. Gideon said, "If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me." The question, you see, was not the truthfulness of God, but whether indeed the Lord had spoken. Zacharias, however, asks an altogether unbelieving question, "Whereby shall I know this?" He wants a sign as the condition of his believing.

You may very rightly pray, "Lord, show me a token for good ;" but you must believe before you get the token, and you must not let your believing depend upon that token. There is a difference, and a wide difference, between believing first and then asking for some cheering evidence, and that unbelieving obstinacy which demands signs and wonders, and declares, "I will not believe unless I see a token." Thomas is an instance of this error when he says, "Except I see in his hand the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, I will not believe." His Master bent to his weakness, but he said, and very significant are the words, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." The chief blessing belongs to you who, whether you have evidences or not, are content to believe your God, taking this word of

God as quite sufficient ground for your confidence without any delights of heart or ecstasies or spiritual visitations. Our God is true even if no wonder be wrought and no sign be given: let us settle this in our hearts, and never allow a doubt to intervene. O Holy Spirit, help us in this thing.

All this together shows that the error of Zacharias was unbelief, and *his chastisement* which he received for it is worthy of our earnest attention. He was chastened for his unbelief because the Lord loved him; his affliction was sent not so much in anger as in love.

He had asked for a sign, and by a sign was he chastened. God often makes us gather the twigs from which he makes the rod with which he scourges us. Our own sins are the thorns which cause us to smart. Zacharias asked for a sign, and he has this sign: "Thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season." For months he shall not be able to speak a single word; but while his mouth is closed to others it shall be open to himself: that dumb mouth of his shall be preaching to him and saying, "You did not believe what was spoken to you of the Lord, and now you are unable to repeat it to others, for the Lord will not employ an unbelieving messenger. If you will not believe when God's angel speaks, you shall not speak yourself." Many a dumb Christian, I am afraid, has had his mouth sealed through unbelief. The Lord saves him and gives him much enjoyment, but he denies him utterance because he has such slender faith. I have no doubt Zacharias was very happy in the prospect of the birth of his child, and looked earnestly onward to the day when John, the prophet of the highest, should be born, and he himself should recover speech; but still it must have been very painful to remain for so long a time in utter silence. How he must have longed to speak or sing. But I have no doubt that many a man is put aside from bearing his testimony through unbelief, which he calls diffidence and delicacy. The Lord says, "I shall never use you as a preacher. I shall not make use of you in addressing your fellow men. I shall not help you to bring men to Christ in private conversation, because you have so little faith. You have doubted me, and now you must be dumb for a season." I hope that, if this be the case with any, your silence will soon end. Lord, open thou their lips, and their mouths shall show forth thy praise. Dear friend, I hope the Lord will unloose your tongue by-and-by, for if you are in a right state of heart it will be a very painful thing to you not to be able to declare what the Lord has done for your soul; but it is so with some, they are dumb because they believe not.

Moreover, Zacharias had the further affliction of being deaf at the same time. How do I know that he was deaf? That is pretty clear, because when his child was born it is recorded in the sixty-second verse that "they made signs to his father how he would have him called;" and, of course, if he had been able to hear there would have been no need to use signs: but he could not hear any more than he could speak, he suffered the double affliction of being deaf and dumb,—no small cross to one who had such gifts of utterance as he showed in his song of praise. It is remarkable that he could not hear anything, but it is also

instructive ; for I have known Christians who, when they would not believe the promise, have become very deaf spiritually. You say, "What do you mean? How are they deaf?" Listen, and you will hear them say, "I cannot hear Mr. So-and-So." It is the same minister whom they used to hear with pleasure—the same man—and God blesses him to others as much as before. How is this? Others are drinking in the word, but these poor deaf people say, "We do not know how it is, but we cannot hear our pastor." No, you did not believe, and therefore you cannot hear. You did not receive his message ; you did not rejoice in it, and now you cannot hear it. That is a dreadful sort of deafness. If you suffer from a physical deafness you can buy a horn, or you can go to some skilful aurist who, perhaps, may help you. Moreover, you can read if you cannot hear ; but if you get a spiritual deafness, I do not know a worse chastisement that can come upon you, nor one that will make you more mischievous to others. O Beloved, do believe the good word of the Lord. With meekness receive the engrafted word, and do not question it and provoke the Lord, lest, haply, because you did not accept the word as the word of God, the time shall come when you will not be able to hear it, and your profiting will utterly depart, and the very voice that once was music to you will have no charms at all, and the blessed truth which once made your heart leap for joy will cease to have the slightest influence upon you. Mary was not sentenced either to be silent or to be deaf, for she believed the word of the Lord which was spoken to her by the angel. O that we also by a full obedience of faith may escape the penalties which surely attach themselves to unbelief. We must needs sorrow, but there can be no reason for increasing it by our own fault ; and we may readily do so, while on the other hand faith brings rest and peace. So much concerning Zacharias.

II. Now let us turn our eyes to MARY. Mary used much the same language, and yet she spake not after the same fashion. She asked of the angel, "HOW SHALL THIS BE?"

In looking at her, first, it is to be noticed that *she believed* what the angel said. It was not "Whereby shall I know this?" but in effect her language was, "I believe it. How shall it be?" There is no unbelief in the question. Of that we are sure, because not long after she is praised by her intelligent cousin, Elizabeth, who declares that "blessed is she that believed : for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord." She was notably a believer.

She asked no sign. She sought no token whatever. The angel's voice sufficed her. The still small voice of divine love within her soul was enough. She believed, and only asked to be instructed in the matter, sign and seal she needed none.

She was willing also to accept all hazards. I would speak with great delicacy, but to the virgin, remember, it was a very serious thing to be the mother of our Lord. To this very day the base tongues of infidels have dared to insinuate gross criminality against her who was blessed among women ; and she must have well known that it was not likely that all would believe what she should aver, and many a hard speech would be uttered concerning her. Indeed, she might have had fear concerning her espoused husband himself, who would have put her away

had not the Lord shielded her. Joseph behaved nobly, like a believer of the first order, and he deserves to be ranked amongst the truest of the saints; as does the virgin herself, who well deserves to be exceedingly commended by all who can appreciate pure, delicate, and yet heroic faith. Whatever there might be of hazard, so great was the honour that was put upon the virgin that she does not appear to have felt the slightest hesitation, but said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it unto me according to thy word."

I think her question may be attributed, in part, to surprise—to inevitable amazement; and what we say to the Lord when we are naturally surprised under the greatness of his mercy will not be weighed by him letter by letter, nor shall we be judged for it, though if very closely examined it might appear like unbelief. The Lord knows his children's frame and remembers that we are dust. I hope that many a word which drops from the child of God when he is in pain, when he is distressed as Job was on the dunghill, is allowed to blow away with the breath which utters it. How very little did the Lord say to Job about the naughty words which in his petulance he had allowed to escape, for after all he was grandly patient; and so even if there had been something of unbelief in these words of Mary, which there was not, yet they would have been viewed by the Lord as the fruit of surprise at the marvellous and unexpected mercy for which she had not even prayed. There was no unbelief in her language, but there was great wonder, surprise, and admiration, at so great a boon. How should this come to her? How should *she* be so highly favoured? Her soul seemed to say, "Whence is this to me? that I, so humble and obscure, a maiden whose rank and race have been altogether forgotten, should be the mother of the Saviour after the flesh, the mother of his humanity by whom humanity is to be redeemed."

She was full of wonder, and then *she began to enquire*. There is the point. She wanted to know how it would be; there was no wrong in that desire; there was no unbelief worthy of rebuke; she believed the surpassing promise, and only wished to know how it could be performed. There might readily enough be unbelief in such an enquiry, but not necessarily so. You and I may say, as the Israelites did in the wilderness when God had promised to give them flesh to eat, "Shall the flocks and herds be slain?" That was unbelievably asking how it should be; but yet you may ask how a promise shall be fulfilled without any mistrust at all; nay, your very faith may raise the enquiry. I know my soul asks again and again many questions of my Lord which he answers to my soul. He would not have answered had they been sinful questions. We ought to enquire about a great many things: we should be sacredly inquisitive. We should say, How is it he has chosen us? For our Lord replies, "Even so Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." But, still, why me? Why me? You may ask that question, for holy gratitude dictates it. And how is it that he could redeem us with the blood of his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord? And how is it that he renews us? And how will it be that he will perfect us? And how can it be that we shall have a mansion in heaven, and shall become like our Lord? And how is it that we shall be raised up? With what body shall we come? Many a question we may ask, which if not

asked in unbelief, will have an answer, or will serve to increase our reverent gratitude.

But now notice concerning Mary that, while Zacharias was the doubter and was treated as such, Mary was the enquirer, and was so dealt with of the Lord. See the difference of the treatment of the two.

For, first, Mary did not ask a sign, but she had one; and it was one of the most pleasant that could possibly come to her, for it was her cousin Elizabeth. She was to be her sign. Behold, she that had been barren shall come to meet her and comfort her. Brethren, the Lord knows how to give you signs if you do not wish for them; and I do believe that those have the most tokens for good who do not ask for them, but are content to take their Father's word without any confirmatory sign.

And, then, there was another thing with regard to her. She was graciously instructed. Zacharias asked a sign, and he had it; she asked for instruction, and she had it. The angel paused awhile and said to her, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore, also, that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." If you will meekly, and believingly, ask of your Lord to be taught concerning divine things, he will give you of his Spirit, who shall lead you into all truth, and instruct you, and make you wise unto salvation.

Now, the conclusion is this: first of all, let us *not do as Zacharias did*. Dear friend, art thou at this moment questioning any promise? Art thou saying, "Whereby shall I know this?" Cease from doubting the infallible word and rest in the Lord, his Holy Spirit enabling thee to believe.

On the other hand, are you a seeking sinner, and does Christ declare that whosoever looks to him shall be saved, and that whosoever believeth in him is not condemned? Do not ask any token, but believe him. He himself is token enough. He is God, and yet man; the bleeding Lamb, the sacrifice for sin. Believe him; believe him; believe him; and you shall have the blessing.

And you, dear child of God, if you have a text of Scripture, a promise which evidently suits your case, which meets your trouble, do not say, "Whereby shall I know this?" When the Spirit says it, it is enough that it is in the word. Whatever the Scripture states, be sure of it; for if all the wise men in the world were to prove it, it would not be proven one bit more; and if they were all to disprove it, it would be none the less sure. If I were to *see* a thing to be true which God had declared in his word, I would not believe my eyes so well as I would believe his word: at least, I ought not to do so. This is where we ought to stand: all the world may deceive, but God cannot; let God be true, and every man a liar. If you will come and trust him in this way you shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, your leaf shall not wither, and you shall not know when drought cometh. If your walk through life is the walk of faith, as Abraham's and Enoch's were, you shall have a grand life—grandly full, and eternal, and Christly; but if you doubt him you shall not be established. The unbeliever shall be as the rolling thing before the whirlwind, as the sear leaf that falleth from the tree, and as the heath of the desert that knoweth not when

good cometh. May the Holy Ghost save us, brothers and sisters, from unbelief, and give us rest in the promise of God.

And now, secondly, *let us with all our hearts imitate Mary* in being enquirers—often asking, desiring to know, and looking deep and searching; for into the promise of God we cannot look too closely, since “these things the angels desire to look into.” You ought so to realize the promise as to be sure that it means what it says, and then you will naturally begin to ask how it will come to pass. Only strive to keep out all unbelief from your enquiry and say, “I know in my heart how it can be, for nothing is impossible with God.” There is our answer to all questionings—“With God all things are possible.” If I enquire, “How can he deliver me?” Nothing is impossible with God. “How can he keep me to the end?” Nothing is impossible with God. “How can he preserve me amid persecution? How can he keep me from temptation, and preserve me from the world, the flesh and the devil?” Nothing is impossible with God. Fling yourself upon omnipotence, and you shall be strong. May the Holy Spirit help you to do this for Christ’s sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Luke i. 5—38.

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REMEMBER!

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 31ST, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee."—Deuteronomy xv. 15.

IN an autobiography of William Jay we read that on one occasion he called to see the famous Mr. John Newton, at Olney, and he observed that over the desk at which he was accustomed to compose his sermons, he had written up in very large letters the following words: "Remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee." To my mind this story invests the text with considerable interest: it was most fitting that such a remarkable convert as he should dwell upon such a theme, and place such a text conspicuously before his own eyes. Might it not with great propriety be placed in a similar position by each one of us? Mr. Newton lived and acted under the influence of the memory which the text commands, as was seen that very morning in his conversation with Mr. Jay. "Sir," said Mr. Newton, "I am glad to see you, for I have a letter just come from Bath, and you can perhaps assist me in the answer to it. Do you know anything of So-and-so (mentioning the name)?" Mr. Jay replied that the man was an awful character, had once been a hearer of the gospel, but had become a leader in every vice. "But, sir," said Mr. Newton, "he writes very penitently; and who can tell? Perhaps a change may have come over him." "Well," said Mr. Jay, "I can only say that if ever he should be converted, I should despair of no one." "And I," said Mr. Newton, "never have despaired of anybody since I was converted myself." So, you see, as he thought of this poor sinner at Bath he was remembering that he also was a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord his God had redeemed him; and why should not the same redemption reach even to this notorious transgressor and save him? The memory of his own gracious change of heart and life gave him tenderness in dealing with the erring and hopefulness with regard to their restoration. May

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some such good effect be produced in our minds : we are not all called to be preachers of the gospel, but in any capacity a holy, beneficial, sanctifying effect will be produced upon a right mind by remembering that we were bondmen, but the Lord our God redeemed us. May the Holy Spirit at this hour bring the amazing grace of God to our remembrance with melting power.

As to the particular fact of the redemption of Israel out of Egypt, great care was taken that it should be remembered: The month upon which they came out was made the commencement of the year. "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you" (Exodus xii. 2). A special injunction was issued: "Observe the month of Abib, and keep the passover unto the Lord thy God: for in the month of Abib the Lord thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night." An ordinance was established on purpose that the deliverance might be commemorated: and the eating of the passover lamb was made binding upon the whole of the people, so that they should not forget the sprinkling of the blood. The word of the Lord ordained, saying, "And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever." They were enjoined, also, to instruct their children concerning it, so that in addition to a ceremonial there was an oral tradition to be handed from father to son. "And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord our God hath commanded you? Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand" (Deuteronomy vi. 20, 21). Their law of ten commands commenced with a reminder of that remarkable fact—"I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage: thou shalt have no other gods before me." All through the book of Deuteronomy you will observe that this is the one weighty and oft repeated argument for obedience and faithfulness: "Remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee."

Now, beloved, if the Jew was so carefully instructed to remember his deliverance out of Egypt, should not we also take heed to ourselves that we by no means forget, or cast into the background, our yet greater redemption through the precious blood of Christ, by which we were set free from the yoke and bondage of sin? See how Paul, in Ephesians ii. 11, 12, 13, speaks to us who have been called by grace from the ends of the earth, "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." He puts the same thought into other words in Romans vi. 17, 18, when he says—"God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." Paul would have us remember

our redemption ; and God the Holy Ghost who spake by Paul would have us remember it. Will we not give earnest heed to such solemn counsels ? The blessed effects that will flow from such a memory urge us to remember it, and because of this our discourse of this morning is intended to be a humble assistance towards such a memory. O my brother, forget all else just now, and give thy heart to the work before thee, and "remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee."

First, then, let us consider *our bondage* ; secondly, *our redemption* ; and thirdly, *the influence of the memory of the two facts*. I shall not try to say anything fresh or new : it would be out of place to attempt it, for my present duty is to awaken your memories as to former days. I have only to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance. He who is only a remembrancer for the past must not look about for novelties. We speak what you do know, and ask you to testify to what you have felt.

I. First let us consider OUR BONDAGE. It was exceedingly like the bondage of the children of Israel in Egypt. There are many points in which a parallel might be drawn. We will indicate them in a few words.

First, when we were unregenerate, and sold under sin, *we were enslaved to a mighty power against which we could not contend*. It would have been of no use for the Israelites to have commenced an insurrection against Pharaoh : he was too firmly established upon the throne, and his soldiery by far too strong for poor, feeble, shepherd tribes to be able to resist. They scarcely dared to think of such a thing : and, brethren, if fallen man single-handed had the heart to contend with sin and Satan, he would certainly be unable to achieve a victory. The fall has left us "without strength" ; the law with all its force is "weak through the flesh." Alas, man hath no heart for spiritual liberty, else would the Lord lend him power ; but apart from power divine, what man is he that can break loose from his sin ? Shall the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots ? Then shall he that is accustomed to do evil learn to do well, unassisted by divine strength. No, brethren, the fetters which enchain the mind of the carnal man are much too strong for him to snap them. He may resolve to do so, as in moments of reflection some men do ; but, alas, he is soon weary of the struggle for liberty, and resigns himself to his prison. If man had been capable of his own redemption there would never have descended from heaven the divine Redeemer ; but because the bondage was all too dire for man to set himself free, therefore the eternal Son of God came hither that he might save his people from their sins. Our natural bondage was caused and maintained by a power tremendous in energy and craft. The prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience, held us beneath his iron sway, and sin exercised a tyrannical dominion over us, from which we could not break.

Worse still, we were like the Israelites in another respect. *Our slavery had so degraded us that we had no heart to desire an escape*. One of the worst points of slavery is that it frequently degrades men into contentment with their condition. That would be thought by some to be a benefit, but it is a giant evil, for a man has no right to be satisfied in slavery. Such contentment is an ensign of debased manhood. Freedom is the right of every human being, and he is not truly a man if he

can be happy in bondage. The Israelites were so trampled down that they crouched at their oppressors' feet, and made themselves as content as they could in their enslaved condition. As they were turned into beasts of burden, so were their minds brutalized, until their chief joy lay in the onions and the cucumbers with which they refreshed themselves, and the fish of which they afterwards spake so longingly. They declined from a thoughtful family into a clan of grovelling labourers without heart or hope; so that when Moses went to them at the first he was not received, and when he was sent of God with his brother Aaron the people at the first hour of conflict shrank into their former cowardice, and would willingly have remained slaves sooner than excite Pharaoh's wrath. They had been ground down so terribly with their hard labour in mortar and in brick that they scarcely dared to think of freedom: and that was just your case and mine, beloved friends, we too were willing slaves of death and sin. If we are free this morning it was not because when left to ourselves we fought for liberty and disdained to wear a fetter. No, our bonds were on our hearts, and we chose our own degradation. The slave from the south of old watched the northern star, and followed it through brake, and swamp, and forest to obtain his liberty, but our eyes refused to look to Jesus, who is the Star of Freedom. We boasted that we were born free, and were never in bondage to any man. and so we most effectually proved our bondage under our own pride. We, perhaps, called ourselves free-thinkers, and at any rate we meant to be free actors, and yet all the while we were in bondage, and did not care to seek true liberty. Can you not recollect when you hugged your chains and kissed your bonds, and like a madman who crowns himself with a wisp of straw, and calls himself a king, embraced the foolish pleasures of this world, and thought yourselves supremely blessed in such base enjoyments?

Remember again, dear brethren, that you were in a bondage similar to that of Egypt, for while in that condition *you toiled hard and found that all the service wherein Satan made you to serve was with rigour.* The Israelites built treasure cities for Pharaoh, and they are supposed to have erected some of the pyramids; but their wage was very small, and their taskmasters were brutal. Labourers engaged upon royal works received no wages, but were simply served with sufficient bread to keep them alive. The Israelites were called upon to make an enormous quantity of bricks, and at last the chopped straw, which was necessary to make the clay bind together, which had been given out of the royal granaries, was refused them, and they were bidden to go over all the land to hunt up what they could of stubble instead of straw; thus their labour was increased beyond all bearing. Could not many a sinner tell of horrible nights and woeful mornings, when under the power of his passions? Who hath woe? who hath redness of the eyes? who is filled with dread of death? who flees when no man pursueth? Of all tyrants sin and Satan are the most cruel. How are men worn out in the devil's destructive service! What an expense does sin entail! It is a costly thing to many to obey their own vices; they are impoverished by their passions. Those who complain if they are pressed for subscriptions to holy causes should consider how much more they would have spent in the pleasures of the world. Why, men squander fortunes upon their frivolities or upon their lusts; and encumber future generations to indulge

a vice which ruins their health, destroys their reputation, and sends them to an early grave. If you will have your own way, that way will be the hardest you can choose. It does not matter in what position a man may be, whether rich or poor, illiterate and fond of the more vulgar pleasures, or tutored and educated and prone to more fashionable vices ; everywhere sin leads on to hard service, and its exactions increase from day to day. If men were but in their senses, drunkenness, gambling, gluttony, wantonness, and many other vices would be rather punishments than pleasures, and yet they abide in them.

There was a time, dear brethren, when in addition to our hard toil *our bondage brought us misery*. Do you not remember when you dared not think a day's conduct over for the life of you ? When if you had been compelled to sit down and review your own character it would have been an intolerable task ? I recollect also when a sense of sin came over me ; and then indeed my life was made bitter with hard bondage. I laboured to set up a righteousness of my own, for I could not yield to the righteousness of Christ. That was labouring as in the very fire. I strove by my own good works to accomplish my own salvation, and tried by prayers and tears to pay the debt I owed to God, but all in vain. I was sinning all the while by refusing Christ, and endeavouring to rival my Saviour. So far I speak for myself, but I know that you have done the same. Do you recollect it, brethren, when your pleasures ceased to be pleasures, when all the amusements of the world lost their flavour, and became flat, stale, nauseous, and you turned away and asked in vain for something that would content you ? Do you remember when at last you saw yourself in your true condition, and bewailed yourself before the living God as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn ? Ah, then you felt like Israel in Egypt when they sighed and cried by reason of the bondage ; and blessed be God the parallel runs further, for in your case also God heard the groaning and remembered his covenant (Exodus ii. 24).

All this while *our enemy was aiming at our destruction*. This was what Pharaoh was driving at with Israel : he intended to cut off the nation by severe tasks, or at least to reduce its strength. As his first policy did not succeed, he set about to destroy the male children ; and even so Satan when he has men under his power labours by all means utterly to destroy them ; for nothing short of this will satisfy him. Every hopeful thought he would drown in the river of despair, lest by any means the man should shake off his yoke. The total overthrow of the soul of man is the aim of the great enemy. What a mercy to have been redeemed out of the hand of the enemy !

And like Israel in Egypt *we were in the hands of a power that would not let us go*. There came a voice by Moses which said to Pharaoh, "Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go ;" but Pharaoh's answer was, "I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go" : and such was the language of our corruptions, such the language of the devil who had dominion over us. "I will not let you go," said the fierce prince of darkness, and like a strong man armed he kept his goods in peace. You recollect that telling sermon which thrilled you and awoke in you desires for liberty : you recollect how there seemed to ring in the halls of your nature the resounding voice, "Let my people go" ; but you did not go, for that slavish will of yours held you in bondage. Your sins

captivated you. Then came the reading of the Scriptures, or a mother's exhortation, or another earnest sermon, and again the voice was heard, "Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go." You begin to feel uneasy in your condition, and to venture somewhat into the border country, but you could not escape, the iron had entered into your soul, your heart was captive. Blessed was the day when the strong man armed that kept you as a man keeps his house was overcome by a stronger than he and cast out for ever. Then Jesus took possession of your nature, never to leave it, but to hold his tenancy world without end. Glory be to God, we were bondmen in Egypt, but the Lord our God redeemed us, and let his name be praised.

I would assist you still further to remember that bondage. It cannot be hard for some of you to do so, for you are "from Egypt lately come." Some of you have been set free now these twenty years, some perhaps these fifty years; but it cannot be difficult for you to recollect what must be so indelibly impressed upon you. I can imagine thirty years after coming out of Egypt, some of the grey fathers who had crossed the Red Sea telling to their sons the sad story of the bondage in Egypt. "I, your father," one of them would say, "was beaten with rods by the task-master because when I had made up my full tale of bricks I was required to make twice as many. I toiled far into the night at brick-making, but I could not accomplish the task, and I remember how the blows descended upon my back like burning hail. Look here, my son," he would say, as he stripped himself to show the scars, "these are the memorials of Egyptian bondage." Ah, glory be to God, we are free; no more do we carry clanking chains upon our souls, but we bear the old scars about us still. Sometimes the old temper rises, or the old lusts flames up. When a man has had a bone broken, it may have been well set, and he has for the most part forgotten the accident, yet in bad weather, I have heard it said, "The old bone talks a bit"; and, alas, the bones we broke by our sins will talk a bit at times, and its talk is a sad reminder of our former state. Snatches of ill songs, recollections of old lusts, and I know not what besides, are scars which remind us that we were bondmen in Egypt. Many a mother that came out of Egypt when she looked at her boy would say, "And I might have been the joyful mother of seven sons, but they were one after another snatched from my bosom by the remorseless servant of the Egyptian tyrant, and put to death." With her joy for what was left her would be mingled sorrow for what she had lost. Yes, and in your families it may be your younger children have been brought under religious influences, but your older sons are as irreligious as you were when they were lads at home. Many are led to think of their own evil example in former years, as they see their wayward sons persevering in sin. As you think of them you may say, "I see my bondage in my son; I see my sin repeated in my child." These also are mournful memorials of our carnal state. But, indeed, I need not thus remind you, for everything may refresh your memories as to your former bondage. Is it not so? The task set before you in the text is an easy one, and I charge you, therefore, remember that you were once bondmen in Egypt.

II. In the second place, we have to think of the blessed fact of OUR

REDEMPTION : “ the Lord thy God redeemed thee.” Here again there is a parallel. He redeemed us first *by price*. Israel in Egypt was an unransomed nation. God claimed of that nation the firstborn to be his ; as it is written, “ Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast : it is mine.” That portion had been his claim from the first, and the law was afterwards carried out by the setting apart of the Levitical tribe to take the place of the firstborn ; but Israel in Egypt had never set apart its firstborn at all, and was therefore an unredeemed people. How was all that indebtedness to be made up ? The nation must be redeemed by a price, and that price was set forth by the symbol of a lamb which was killed, and roasted, and eaten, while the blood was smeared upon the lintel and the two side posts. Beloved, you and I have been redeemed with blood. Blessed Lord Jesus, “ thou wast slain and hast redeemed us unto God by thy blood.” “ Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” Ye cannot, ye must not, ye shall not forget this. Ye were bondmen, but Jesus your Lord redeemed you. He took your nature, and was thus next of kin to you ; and it became his right to redeem you, which right he has exercised to his own cost but to your eternal gain. The price by which you were set free he counted down in a wondrous coinage, minted from his own heart. The ransom is paid, and the jubilee trumpet proclaims that you and your heavenly possessions are now delivered from all mortgage and encumbrance through the blood of Jesus Christ. Remember that with a great price you have obtained this freedom. The Lord saith, “ I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee.”

But there would not have been a coming out of Egypt unless there had been a display of *power* as well as a payment of price, for with a high hand and an outstretched arm the Lord brought forth his people. There are always two redemptions to every man who is saved—redemption by price and redemption by power. Ye know what power God put forth in the land of Egypt when he wrought all his plagues in the field of Zoan, but that was nothing compared with the power of Christ when he broke the head of the old dragon, when he utterly destroyed the kingdom of sin and led our captivity captive. Greater than Moses’ rod was Christ’s pierced hand. He hath done it ; he hath done it. Our tyrant hath no more power to hold us in chains, for Christ hath vanquished him for ever.

Another form of redemption was also seen by Israel, namely, in the *power exerted over themselves*. I think sufficient stress has never been laid upon this. That they should have been *willing* to come out of Egypt was no small thing,—universally willing, so that not a single person remained behind ; so unanimous and so eager were they to come out of Egypt, though almost rooted to the soil, that a number of Egyptians came up with them. According to the word of Moses, “ Not a hoof shall be left behind,” they all left the land, and neither sheep, nor goat, nor ox ; much less man, woman, or child remained. Israel was glad to come out, and even Egypt was glad when they departed. It is wonderful that they were all *able* to come out of Egypt. There was never an army yet but what had some sick in it : the ambulance and the hospital are always wanted : but of this grand army we are told, “ He brought them forth

also with silver and gold : and there was not one feeble person among their tribes." Marvellous display of power this : and so, beloved, we will tell it to the praise of God this day, that he made us willing to come out of the Egypt of our sin to which we were rooted ; and making us willing he made us able too : the power of the Spirit came upon us and the might of his grace overshadowed us, and we did arise and came to our Father. Let grace have all the glory.

Shall I need to press upon you then to let your minds fly back to the time when you realised your redemption, and came up out of the land of Egypt ? It was a divine interposition. "*The Lord thy God redeemed thee.*" And it was personally experienced, for "*The Lord thy God redeemed thee.*" It was a matter of clear consciousness to your own soul. Thou wast a bondman ; thou didst know it and feel it : the Lord thy God redeemed thee, and thou didst know it and feel that also. Thou didst know it as much as a galley slave would know it if he no more tugged the oar, as much as the captive who has pined away in the dungeon through weary years would know it when once more he breathed the air, and felt that he was free. "*Thou wast a bondman, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee.*" There can be no doubt about it. Satan himself could not make some of us doubt it, the chains were so real, and the liberty so delightful. It was a mental phenomenon for which there can be no accounting except upon this belief, that the Lord our God himself came and set us free.

III. Thus, brethren, I have set before you the subject for your recollection. I shall now try to show you THE INFLUENCE WHICH THIS DOUBLE MEMORY OUGHT TO HAVE UPON YOU.

We should naturally conclude, without any reference to Scripture, that if a Christian man kept always in mind his former and his present state it would render him *humble*. You have been preaching and God has blessed you to the conversion of many : do you feel elated ? "*Remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee.*" You are getting on in knowledge, and your character is evidently much improved ; your inner life is full of peace and comfort. Do you feel as if you were some great one ? Do not play the fool : you are less than nothing. Remember that thou wast a poor miserable slave, brown, sun-dried, smoke-tinged ; and that not long ago. Thou wouldst have been in hell now if it had not been for sovereign grace ; or if not there, perhaps thou wouldst have been among drunkards and swearers, and lewd men and women, or at least among the proud, self-righteous Pharisees. When thou art honoured of the Lord and happy in the full assurance of faith, still remember that thou wast a bondman, and walk humbly with thy God.

In the next place, be *grateful*. If you have not all the temporal mercies that you would desire, yet you have received the choicest of all mercies, liberty through Jesus Christ, therefore be cheerful, happy, and thankful. Remember that thou wast a bondman ; and if thou hast but little of this world's good, be thankful for the great spiritual blessing thou hast received in being set free from the galling yoke. Do not receive such a liberty as this without blessing that dear, pierced hand which was nailed to the tree that thou mightest be delivered. Let gratitude abound, as thou rememberest the wormwood and the gall.

Being grateful, be *patient* too. If you are suffering or ailing, or if sometimes your spirits are cast down, or if you are poor and despised, yet say to yourself, "Why should I complain? My lot may seem hard, yet it is nothing in comparison with what it would have been if I had been left a prisoner in the land of Egypt. Thank God, I am no longer in bondage to my sins." The slave of the sad times in America would leap on the Canadian shore; and though he came there with all his earthly goods wrapped up in his handkerchief, and knew not where his next meal would come from, yet he would spring upon the shore and then dance for joy, and say, "Thank God, I am free; I am penniless but free." How much more, then, may you, whatever your suffering or sorrow may be, exclaim, "Thank God, I was a bondman, but the Lord my God has redeemed me, and I will be patient, whatever I am called to bear."

Next, be *hopeful*. What may you not yet become? "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." You were a bondman, but grace has set you free. Who knows what the Lord may yet make of you? Is there anything that he cannot, will not do for one whom he has already redeemed by his blood? He has set you free from sin; oh, then, he will keep you from falling, and preserve you to the end. "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."

Are you thus hopeful? Then be *zealous*. Here earnestness should find both fire and fuel: we were bondmen, but the Lord has redeemed us. What, then, can be too hard for us to undertake for his sake? We must give all to him who has purchased us to himself, and we must continue to do so as long as we live. John Newton persisted in preaching even when he was really incapable of it, for he said "What, shall the old African blasphemer leave off preaching Jesus Christ while there is breath in his body? No, never." He felt that he must continue to bear testimony, for our text was always before him, "Remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee."

But now kindly follow me while I, as briefly as I can, show you the Lord's own use of this remembrance; and the first text I shall quote will be found in Deuteronomy v. 14. This is what he says—"The seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out of thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day." You were a bondman. What would you have given for rest then? Now that the Lord has given you this hallowed day of rest guard it sacredly. When you were a bondman you knew the heart of a servant and you sighed because your toil was heavy; now that you are set free, if you have servants, think of them, and so order your household that they may as much as possible enjoy their Sabbath. Certain household duties must be performed, but plot and plan to make these as light as possible, "that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou." If you meet with any that are in bondage of soul and cannot rest, obey

the text in its spiritual teaching. Rest in the Lord Jesus yourself, but endeavour to bring all your family into the same peace, "that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou." Surely if you have been set free from the iron bondage you ought not to want urging to keep with all sacredness this holy day, which the mercy of God has hedged about, nor should you need exhorting to rest in the Lord, and to endeavour to lead others into his rest.

In Deuteronomy vii. we have another use of this remembrance. Here the chosen people are commanded to keep separate from the nations. They were not to intermarry with the Canaanites nor make alliances with them. Israel was to be separated, even as Moses said, "thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God." And the reason he gives in the eighth verse is this : "the Lord redeemed thee out of the house of bondmen." Ah, brethren, if we are redeemed from among men, if there be a special and particular redemption, as we do believe, by which Christ loved his church and gave himself for it, then as the specially blood-bought ones we are under solemn obligations to come out from the world and to be separate from it. Did not Jesus say of his redeemed, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world"? Therefore come ye out from among them, and be ye separate.

In the eighth chapter redemption is used as an argument for obedience, and they are exhorted not to forget the laws and statutes of the Lord, and above all warned lest in the midst of prosperity their heart should be lifted up so as to forget the Lord their God, who brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. The same argument runs through the eleventh chapter, and it is a very clear one. We ought to render glad obedience to him who has wrought us so great a deliverance.

We find in the thirteenth chapter that the redemption from bondage is used as an argument for loyal attachment to the one and only God. The tendency of the nation was to idolatry, since all the countries round about had gods many and lords many ; but the Lord commanded his people to put to death all prophets and dreamers of dreams who might seek to lead them away from the worship of Jehovah. "Thou shalt stone him with stones that he die," says the tenth verse, "because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." You must not have another God, for no other God delivered you : worship him to whom you owe your all.

Our own text is set in the following connection. If a man entered into forced servitude, or came under any bonds to his fellow man among the Jews, he could only be so held for six years, and on the seventh he was to go free. "And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty : thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress : of that wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee." The Lord's people should be considerate of those who are in their employment. The recollection of their own bondage should make them tender and kind to those who are in subservience to themselves, and never should a Christian man be

ungenerous, illiberal, severe, churlish with his servants, or with any who are dependent upon him. Be large-hearted. Do not be angry at every little fault, nor swift to observe every slight mistake ; and be not for ever standing on your exact rights, litigious, sticking out for the last half-farthing, as some do. I am almost sorry if a mean, stingy man gets converted, for I am afraid he will be no credit to Christianity. There should be in a man redeemed with the blood of Christ something like nobility of soul and benevolence to his fellow men, and so even this stern book of the law teaches us.

I have no time except to remind you that they were bound to keep the passover because of their deliverance from Egypt as we find in the sixteenth chapter at the first verse. "Observe the month of Abib, and keep the passover unto the Lord thy God : for in the month of Abib the Lord thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night." So let us also take heed unto ourselves that we keep all the statutes and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly. Let us keep the ordinances as they were delivered unto us, and neither alter nor misplace them. Hold fast the truth and be not moved from it by the cunning craftiness of men. Walk according to the teaching of Scripture in all things, keeping the good old way, because the Lord our God redeemed us, and his truth is unchangeable.

Again, in the sixteenth chapter, verses 10 to 12, you have the great redemption used as an argument for liberality towards the cause of God : they were to give unto the Lord rejoicingly of that which the Lord had given to them. "Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which he hath given thee ;" and that because of the twelfth verse, "Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt : and thou shalt observe and do these statutes." In the twenty-sixth chapter the same teaching is reduced to a set form, for they were there commanded to bring each one a basket of first fruits and offer it unto the Lord, saying—"The Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terrible-ness, and with signs, and with wonders : and he hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land, which thou, O Lord, hast given me." Need I even for a moment impress this duty upon you ?

Last of all, in the twenty-fourth chapter there remains one more lesson. We are there exhorted to be careful concerning the fatherless and the widow (Deut. xxiv. 17). A generous spirit was to be exhibited towards the poor. They were not to fetch in all their sheaves from the field if any were forgotten, nor to scrape up every single ear of corn from among the stubble, as some do in these days, nor to beat their olive tree twice, nor to gather the grapes of their vineyard a second time, but they were to leave something for the poor. This was the argument:—When you were in Egypt, when you had to make bricks without straw, how glad you were to turn your children in among the stubble to gather a few ears to make a loaf of bread ; and now the Lord has given you a better land, therefore deal well with the poor. Brethren, let the needy never be forgotten by you ; do not be miserly, do not imitate those farmers who would comb their fields with a small-toothed comb if they could, sooner than the poor should

glean, raking it and raking it again and again. No, the ransomed Israelites were not even to pick all their fruit, for the argument was, "Would not you when in Egypt have given anything for a bunch of those grapes which grew in the gardens of the rich?" Think, therefore, of the poor and deal kindly with them, even as you would wish others to deal with you.

With this I close. Be ye thoughtful of all your fellow-men. You that have been redeemed with price, be ye tender-hearted, full of compassion, putting on bowels of mercy. In spiritual things take care that you never rake the corners of your fields. Do not rob the gospel of its sweetness. There is a class of preaching out of which the last ear of wheat has been taken. Their gospel is criticised into nothing. The sceptical commentators come in and pick nearly every bunch of grapes, and then the modern thought gentry devour the rest. The preaching of modern times is as an olive tree beaten till not a trace of fruit remains. Let it not be so with us, but let the preacher say, "I was a bondman, and therefore I will drop handfuls on purpose for poor souls in trouble."

Brethren, be very considerate to seekers. Look them up. Talk to them after the sermon. Say a word to those sitting in your pew which may encourage their poor trembling hearts to lay hold on Jesus Christ. Remember that thou wast a bondman: the smell of the brick-kiln is upon thee now, my brother, my sister: thou hast not yet cleansed all the clay from thy hands with which thou didst work in mortar and in brick. Then do not become selfish, unloving, unkind, but in all things love thy neighbour as thyself, and so prove that thou lovest the Lord thy God with all thy heart. God bless thee. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Deuteronomy vi.

1—15; xxiv. 17—22; xxvi. 1—11.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—152, 660, 810.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

COMPASSION ON THE IGNORANT.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.”—Hebrews v. 2.

THIS is a part of the necessary qualification of a priest. Under the old law there were priests who were taken from among men in order that they might speak to God for men, and might speak to men for God. They were taken from among men, not from among angels; and they were taken from men compassed with infirmity, and not from absolutely perfect men like those in heaven, in order that they might be familiar with sinful and suffering men, and on a level with them. When the people of Israel came to them they saw that they were speaking to persons who knew and understood their weaknesses and sorrows, and not to exalted beings who would look down upon them with serene indifference. They felt that they could approach their priest without the awe which creates a freezing distance, as though a yawning crevasse opened between; and when they spoke to their friend, the minister of God, they felt that they could tell him their trials and troubles, for he had felt the same, and therefore was able to console and comfort them. Many a kindly word the good man spake before he sent them back to their houses, which he never could have spoken unless he had been a man himself “compassed with infirmity.” Loving them and being such as they were, he was able to have patience with the many strange cases which came before him; he was not soon vexed by their stupidity, but listened carefully to what they had to say, trying to solve their difficulties, and to meet their cases. He knew that he too was weakness and folly itself before his God, and his own afflictions and tremblings made him feel that he must be gentle to others since the Lord had been tender to him. It was, in the all-wise providence of God, ordained that the sons of Aaron should be men compassed with infirmity that they might compass others with sympathy. Men

admire an iron duke for war, but who could bear an iron priest in the hour of trouble? A brazen wall is good for a defence, but we need a breast of flesh and blood for consolation. Give me for a spiritual comforter and guide, not an infallible pontiff, nor a thrice-crowned spiritual lord, but a brother of my own condition, a friend possessed of a nature like my own.

After mentioning this fact, which is stated in the text, I would bring forth two remarks which will constitute the essence of our discourse. The first is, that *compassion and forbearance are two great qualifications for doing good to our fellow-men*; and, secondly—and upon this I shall dwell at length—that *both of these are found pre-eminently in our Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore we may with boldness come to him*. May the great Spirit whose teaching is our sole means of profiting bless our meditation.

I. First, then, COMPASSION AND FORBEARANCE ARE TWO THINGS WHICH ANY MAN WHO WOULD DO GOOD TO HIS FELLOW-MEN OUGHT TO POSSESS TO A VERY LARGE DEGREE.

You will have plenty of use for all the compassion and all the tenderness that you can possibly command, for *this will help to draw around you those who are ignorant and out of the way*. Men will not gather to some individuals: they are too hard, too cold, too stern. They seem cut out of stone, they have no feeling; or else they are dry and leathery, and have none of the juice of humanity in them—no warm blood—no milk of human kindness, and you are not attracted to them. Who loves a bag of old nails, or a sack of sawdust? And yet some men and women are almost as hard and dry. If you want to draw people around you, you must have sympathy with them: compassion magnetizes a man, and makes him attract as the loadstone fascinates the needle. A big heart is one of the main essentials to great usefulness. Try and cultivate it. Do not let another man's sorrow fall upon a deaf ear as far as you are concerned, but sorrow with the sorrowful, and have compassion upon the ignorant and those that are out of the way: they will soon perceive it, and they will do to you as they did to your Master, of whom we read, "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners." Men will cluster around you like bees around their queen, they will not be able to help it; they will not wish to help it. Love is the queen bee, and where she is you will find the centre of the hive.

By this same spell you will hold those whom you gather, for men will not long remain with an unloving leader: even little children in our classes will not long listen to an unsympathetic teacher. Great armies of soldiers must be led by a great soldier, and children must be held in hand by child-like instructors. When human beings surround an uncompassionate personage they soon find it out, and fly off at a tangent as if by instinct. You may collect people for a time by some extraneous means, but unless they perceive that you love them, and that your heart goes out with desires for their good, they will soon weary of you. The multitude still clung to the skirts of Jesus, even to the last, whenever he preached, because they saw that he really desired their good. You, dear friend, must have compassion if you are to keep up the attention of those whom you address. The earth is held together by the force of

attraction, and to the men upon it that same power is exercised by love and compassion.

Compassion in your heart will also be greatly useful in moving sinners to care for themselves. I believe there are some people who never will feel about their own souls until they are driven to it by seeing that other people feel for them. If I remember the story aright, Mr. Knill at one time was distributing tracts at Chester, and went out where there was a company of soldiers. Many received the tracts, but one man tore the little book in pieces before the good man's eyes; and on another occasion the same individual said to the soldiers, "Now make a ring round him." The men stood round the preacher, and then the wicked fellow cursed him in such a frightful manner that Mr. Knill burst into tears to hear such awful sounds. The sight of Knill's tears broke the heart of the blasphemer: nothing else could have touched him, but he could not bear to see a strong man who was at least his equal, and, probably, his superior, weeping over him. Years after he came forward to own that the tender emotion displayed by Mr. Knill had touched his inmost soul, and led him to repentance. Now, if you have compassion on other people, they will wonder why you should be so much concerned for them. "Why do you care for me?" said a reprobate to an earnest Christian who tried to win him. "Ah," said another, who looked at it from the opposite side, "no one cares for my soul. I have nobody to pray for me, nobody to care for me, or I might have some hope." It is clear, beloved brother or sister, that if you feel moved of God to seek the good of your fellow-men, as I trust you do, the first thing you want is compassion, forbearance, patience, sympathy, and without these you will no more touch the hearts of those to whom you speak than would a parrot or a talking automaton.

You also want great compassion to insure your own perseverance, for if you do not love the children of your class, if you do not love the people whom you try to benefit as you go from house to house, if you have no compassion on the dying sinners around you, you will soon give up your mission, or go about it in a merely formal manner. You will not find the conquest of the human heart to be an easy thing; indeed, it is the most arduous of all enterprises, and unless you so love men that you will bear a thousand rebuffs and disappointments, and still will press on with the blessed news of mercy—unless, I say, you have a compassion as enduring as your own life you will fail and be discouraged, and cast away the sacred nets with which you fish for men, and the seed-basket from which you scatter the heavenly seed. You may perhaps continue to sow a handful here and there, but you will never reap a large harvest unless the heart moves the hand.

Besides, compassion of heart can alone teach you how to speak to others. I have been often pleased to see how young converts manage to tell out the love of Christ to people much older than themselves, and to do it very effectively too. You cannot take a man into college and teach him how to preach to sinners rightly by giving him books, or lectures, or rules. No, that must be learnt by a kind of instinct of the new nature which teaches the man who is ordained to it. Nobody, I suppose, teaches the young mother how to manage her first child, and yet somehow or other it is done, because she loves it. It is wonderful to

me how a widow with quite a swarm of children somehow provides for them. I cannot tell how, but the love she bears them leads her to make exertions which would seem impossible to any one else, and the little ones are somehow or other housed and fed and clothed. If you have love enough, you can win any man to Jesus, by God's grace. If his heart is as hard as a diamond, why then you must have a purpose twice as hard as a diamond, and you will cut him to the heart yet. If you are resolved that you will move heaven and earth but what such a soul shall feel the power of the gospel, and if you will go with mighty prayer and invoke the aid of the Divine Spirit, I do not see that you can fail. You *must* do good if you have but love enough and heart enough. These are the main qualifications, I believe, for a minister of the gospel, for the teacher of a Sunday-school class, or for any other sort of Christian worker—plenteous compassion and unfailing forbearance.

If you possess these two things, dear friends, you will find that they will be very much tried and exercised. It will not be long, young worker, if you plunge into the midst of Christian service, before you will meet with open opposition. Scoffers will rail at you, fools will jest at you; it may be, profane persons will swear at you. This is no uncommon thing. Now, if you can look upon an open opposer with compassion you will not lose your temper, neither will you be at all distressed, except for his own sake. The surest way of putting down your opponents is to feel that they cannot make you angry or drive you from your purpose. Feel that you love them all the more because you see how greatly they need the gospel; and then the more they sin the more will you be certain that theirs is a case of great necessity, requiring you to be in sevenfold earnest. I do not think, however, that all workers are so much put about by open opposition as they are by those persons who never oppose, but who at the same time never yield. I do not know, sometimes, how to get on with certain people with whom I speak about Christ. They say, "Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Yes, sir." You say, "But, my dear friend, there is a necessity for a new heart." They answer, "Yes, sir, yes." "And you know there is no salvation except by faith in Christ." "Yes, sir. Yes, sir." I have spoken to one person several times, who always thanks me for doing so, and declares that it is very kind of me to speak to him, and he is very much obliged to me; and "Yes, sir. Yes, sir." That is all I can get out of him. I do not wish he would swear at me, but if he would but say something or other rather outrageous, so that I might go at him hammer and tongs, I should really feel a little hopeful about him: but he never does this, and I cannot therefore get at him. He will come and hear a sermon, and he will not make many remarks about it, but he will say, "It was very nice, and very clever, and quite a treat," and that is all. You cannot entice these Pliables any farther; they conquer you by yielding, even as the bulrush vanquishes the north wind by bowing before it. These people disquiet earnest labourers, and make heavy demands upon their compassion. We must get much love into our hearts, and have pity upon these poor india-rubber souled people, or we shall become wearied and leave them to their fate. Have pity upon them, and still go on with your holy endeavours, bearing and forbearing, even though they seem to frustrate you.

You will, also, often meet with very deceitful, hopeful persons, who encourage you much but disappoint you more. You say, "I saw a tear in that man's eye when I was preaching." Yes, he has a watery eye—perhaps has been drunk, and it is easy to weep *then*. You lose your man after all. You say, "That woman is so attentive and earnest, I really think there is an impression made upon her." But by-and-by you discover that there was a motive for the apparent attention, and it was all pretence. Now is the time to have your compassion in full exercise, and the more often you are disappointed the more compassion must you feel, and the more must you resolve, God helping you, never to give up any one until the funeral knell shall toll, and the soul shall have passed beyond the region of your influence.

Alas! there is another and still more wearisome trial of faith and patience, for out of those who profess to be converted there are many who cause us grief of heart. Even when the wheat is come to the ear we may yet lose our harvest, even as the husbandman, by smut and mildew, may see his fields blasted before his eyes. There are to be found persons who come forward and avow themselves to be upon the Lord's side, but very soon grow cold, fall into sin, and turn aside from the narrow way. "They went out from us, but they were not of us," says John, "for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us." These are heart-breakers; thorns in our side and swords in our bones, causing us sharp sorrows and doing grievous mischief. Like Judas, they sell Christ for money and betray their Master, and so prove themselves to be the children of perdition, though for awhile numbered with Christ's disciples. Even these we must not cast off utterly, but pity them still, and seek after the straying sheep. Do, my dear brothers and sisters, shun everything that would make your heart callous towards the most provoking and deceitful; it is true their conduct tends to petrify the heart, but yield not to the wretched influence, or you will suffer loss. Living in a city like this, where you get imposed upon very often, it is recommended to some people to get a little hard-hearted, but I cannot sanction such advice. I fear you will find the process acting upon you without your seeking it, but I would urge you to strive against it. Better to be often deceived than to become unfeeling. I would sooner be a dupe than a brute, though there is no need to be either the one or the other. Try still to be tender-hearted, pitying, and full of compassion, and labour still with all your might to be as the text says—"A man who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way."

Now, there are many reasons why we should have a great deal of compassion and forbearance. God has a great deal with us. You say that such a person grieves you. Alas, he has grieved God much more than you. Oh, but you have had patience with him, and tried to bring him to Christ now these ten years. Remember that the Lord has had patience with him, perhaps, these fifty years. Do you reply, "But you do not know how badly he treats me"? No, but you forget how badly he treats your Lord Jesus. Has not man always provoked God? Have not the people grieved his Holy Spirit these thousands of years? It is a thought that ought to lay us in the dust, the innumerable provocations which surround the Most High and arise even from one man.

But what must be the provocations caused by the four millions of this great city? What must they be from all the millions of the known world? Idols are worshipped, and blocks of wood and stone set up and called gods while the true God is neglected. False doctrine is taught, a man claims to be infallible, Christ is forgotten, men trust in their own works and glory in their own pretended righteousness, and is not the Lord angered by all this? What with open blasphemy, Sabbath breaking, and a thousand forms of sin, God is terribly provoked; and yet he bears with it from day to day, and does not suffer his fierce anger to smoke against his guilty creatures.

Is not the divine forbearance the miracle of miracles? I am sure when I stood for a few minutes at the bottom of Pilate's Staircase in Rome, and saw the poor creatures crawling up and down it on their knees, and the priests looking on, I thought that if I had the loan of a thunderbolt or two I would have cleared out all the impostors and their trumpery in the twinkling of an eye; and then I recollected that they were dealing with God and not with man. He looks down on antichrist and all its blasphemies and still stays his hand. He sees in this city of London sins which I dare not mention; yet does his thunder sleep. He hears man curse him, and even defy him to his face, and still do his compassions go forth, and he beareth with them still. Wonderful, wonderful is the omnipotent longsuffering of the Lord. Oh, then, my brethren, we ought surely to have patience with the trifling affronts which we have to put up with in the service of God, and we ought never to grow weary in well doing.

Here is another point which will touch some of you more closely. Think, my dear brother in Christ, what patience God had with you, all those years before your conversion, and multitudes of times since. He has not cast you off, nor grown weary of you despite your ill manners: and if he has had patience with *you*, should not you have patience with your fellow sinner even to the end? There is one reflection which may help you. Remember that these poor souls who sin as they do should be looked upon by you as persons who are deranged, for sin is madness. That prodigal who spent his money riotously was out of his mind, for we read that when he repented "he came to himself." Look at sinful men as mad, and you will pity them and bear with them. If you have a poor daughter at home whose mind is gradually failing, you say, "Do not take much notice of what she says. Her poor mind wanders. Her faculties are out of order." These poor souls are out of order too, their minds have wandered from God; do not take much notice of their ravings; go on and do them all the good you can, notwithstanding their idle talk and petulant complaining. View them as sick folk, and when people are ill, you know, they will be very touchy, and very soon irritated; and, perhaps, they will say naughty things, but you say to yourselves, "It is the fever or the pain which makes them rattle on in that bewildered manner. Never mind them." You are very tender with the ailing ones, are you not? A man tells you that when he spoke a cross word to you the other night he had a wretched toothache at the moment, and you reply "I beg you not to mention it, I quite understand you now." Look on sinners in that light, and say of them, "Poor souls, this malady of sin has so laid hold upon them that I must

not regard them as in their senses, but must pity them." Such a view of human nature will greatly help you to have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way.

And do recollect this,—if you do not have compassion you cannot do them good. If you become weary of them, and speak sharply, you cannot bless them; and, perhaps, if *you* are not the means of blessing them, nobody else may be. Ah, is it your own husband? Wife, win him, win him. Do not drive him from bad to worse by scolding him. Sister, is it your brother? Woo him and win him to Christ. Do not vex him by becoming acid and sour. I am afraid that sharpness of speech, and quickness of temper, may have much to answer for, since in a moment it may cut the cords with which men were being drawn in the right direction. Have compassion still; have compassion on obstinate ignorance and wilful rebellion. Recollect, the more trouble it costs you to bring a soul to Christ the greater will be your reward. In your own conscience you will feel a sweet recompense when you will in after days be able to say, "I travailed in birth for that soul." You will love it all the more because of the anguish of your spirit during its birth. I am sure it is so: that which costs us most we value most. Jabez was more honourable than his brethren, because his mother bare him with sorrow. Jacob gave one portion to Joseph above his brethren, because the archers had sorely shot at him and wounded him; and that portion was the more precious because the patriarch took it out of the hand of the Amorite with his sword and with his bow. If there is a soul that you have, as it were, brought to Christ by severe fightings, taking it out of the hand of the Amorite with your sword and with your bow, that soul will be more precious to you than any other. So, beloved, I pray the Holy Spirit to overshadow the company of Christian workers here present and all that are throughout the whole earth, that they may have "compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; inasmuch as they themselves also are compassed with infirmity."

II. But now for the second part of our subject, which may the eternal Spirit greatly bless. COMPASSION AND FORBEARANCE PRE-EMINENTLY DWELL IN JESUS CHRIST. Though he was not compassed with any sinful infirmity, for in him is no sin, yet physical infirmity he did take, and he is, to the very highest possible degree, the Lord of tenderness.

"His heart is made of tenderness,
His bowels melt with love."

First,—for I will keep to my text, and not be very long—first, he has compassion on the ignorant. That is to say, sins of ignorance Jesus readily puts away. Some of you did not know better while you lived in unregeneracy. You have been trusting in your good works, but though you might well have suspected, you did not know, that they were a faulty foundation for your hope. Some of you were very diligent in outward forms and ceremonies; you had a zeal for God, but it was not according to knowledge: you did not know that salvation is to be found in Jesus only. There are many who, if they had known, would not have crucified the Lord of Glory year by year as they have done. They may say as Paul did, "But I did it ignorantly in unbelief."

Well, dear hearts, if you have been living in sin, not knowing what you were doing, if you have rejected the Saviour whom you would not have rejected if you had known him better, the Lord Jesus, our great high priest, readily blots out such sins. Come to him. Say, "What I know not teach thou me. Cleanse thou me from secret faults," and though you cannot now in looking back discover all the evil of your conduct and the sin of your life, yet, nevertheless, let him see what is in your heart, lay it bare before him, and he will have compassion on your ignorance and put away your sin for ever.

But the text does not refer alone to sins resulting from ignorance, but to ignorance itself. Very many persons are wilfully ignorant of Christ. They might have known about him if they would. Possibly some have come to this place this evening who very seldom attend a place of worship, though there is one in the street in which they live. Any man in London who does not know the gospel has nobody to blame for it but himself. It would be well worth while for you to walk a hundred miles to hear Jesus Christ preached, but I thank God few of you need to walk one mile to hear the gospel. You may hear it if you will; and if you Londoners perish, you perish with the opportunity of life brought to your very doors. I have no doubt there are many living now in utter ignorance of Christ, and yet they have the Bible in their houses and have Christian neighbours who would be glad enough to explain it to them, and they might go and hear the gospel if they would; so that the sun is shining and they shut their eyes, the thunder is pealing and they close their ears. Is not this enough to move the Lord to anger? And yet his patience continues. Still will the Lord Jesus have compassion upon you who have been cruel to yourselves as well as contemptuous to him. Come to him just as you are, and confess your wilful blindness, and he will put it away, and enable you to understand the things which make for your peace.

Some are ignorant, however, because they have been cast where they could not well know; they were born in an ungodly family, or thrown among godless people, or, what is much the same, among those who have only a mere formal religion. They do not know the truth, but they can scarcely be blamed for it. Well, dear hearts, Christ is able to teach you. Come and sit at his feet, for he will have compassion on your ignorance. Some are very young, and therefore do not understand much: dear young people, there are some of you here: Jesus is quite ready to have compassion on the ignorance of little children, and save them. They may know but very little, but if they know Christ Jesus to be the Saviour of sinners he will have compassion on their ignorance. Alas, others are getting very old, but they are so dull that we cannot get much knowledge into their heads, and their ears are dull of hearing. I sometimes have such an enquirer to talk to, and I try to show great compassion to such. I have long, long ago given up estimating character by the amount of intelligence, for I sometimes find that the most intelligent are the best able to deceive me. How often in daily life we find that the most knowing are the most cunning, and the greatest scholars are the biggest rogues. We see plenty of instances in the newspapers. On the other hand, many a poor soul who cannot get two ideas into his head has got the right idea, the grand gospel idea,

and that fills his head and heart. He knows that Christ came into the world to save sinners, and he hangs on to that. Some of the simplest hearted people are quick of understanding in the fear of the Lord. The Lord will have compassion on such ignorance readily enough.

There are many, alas, who are ignorant, not from want of capacity or lack of faculty, but because sin has made them so brutish that they cannot understand. Like salt cast on the soil, it has made the mind barren. This is a frightful state of heart. Yet there are in this city of ours many who have so soaked themselves in the grossest vices that they appear to be incapable of knowing purity, delicacy, truth, holiness, or any divine excellence. They have so indulged themselves in drunkenness, chambering, wantonness, and rioting, that you really cannot get a spiritual idea into them: they have developed backward into the mere animal, and like the swine, they feed on husks, and have no idea above the mire they wallow in. Our City missionaries can tell us the brutifying power of sin, if we have never seen it for ourselves. As grace makes fools wise, so sin makes wise men fools; as grace turns stone to flesh, so sin turns flesh to stone; as grace lifts man to the angels, so sin sinks him to the devils. Sin is a murky cloud which buries the human mind in sevenfold night, which it seems impossible to pierce with a beam of day; yet when a flash of light from God the Holy Spirit does penetrate the thick Egyptian darkness of such a soul, Jesus manifests his compassion on the ignorant, and proves his saving power. Oh, my brethren, what a mercy it is that the Lord Jesus Christ saves people who know very little about him. The poor woman who touched the hem of his garment made a mistake, I suppose, in imagining that power must necessarily dwell in his raiment, but, nevertheless, the Lord went with her mistake, and let the virtue go even out of his robe as well as out of himself. He will meet you, dear friend, meet you where you are, and grasp the hand of even your blind and lame faith, and save you. However deeply ignorant you may be, he will have compassion on your ignorance by sending forth his light and his salvation, and you shall know him and rejoice in him. When he was here, you know, he picked up a few fishermen and taxgatherers, and such like; and he set to work to teach them; and how beautifully he did it! He taught them with parables and little easy words, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little. Look at that gospel of John. Look at any of the sermons of Christ. How very different they are from the very magnificent discourses which we get from the learned and thoughtful divines of the present period. *They* preach over people's heads, but Christ preached into people's hearts. He taught so plainly and simply that anybody could understand him; but these great doctors preach so that they do not even understand themselves. All this makes us see that our Lord had compassion on the ignorant.

I would repeat the thought that he did not teach those disciples too much at once. He gave them one idea at a time, and he did not drive that out with another; but he said, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." What he did teach was mainly simple, and he left it till the Holy Spirit was given for Paul to elaborate the gospel and tell us in plain language some of the more doctrinal truths. He was bent on teaching his disciples as much as they could

receive; and so he did, but he taught them no more, lest they should be overfed and become unable to digest what they had received. And then, how very little chiding there was in all our Lord's conversation with his pupils. He did say, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?" He did have now and then to upbraid, because of the hardness of their hearts, but still what gentleness there was about such rebukes, and how seldom did they occur. And he never turned one of them out of his class for being stupid. If he had done that, perhaps, some friend here might suppose he would turn him or her out; but out of all the twelve there was not one to whom he said, "Now, I really never shall make much of you; your intellect is too weak." Not at all. He taught each one as much as he could receive, and then said, "Go and tell it out to others!" and while they told it out to others they were learning it better themselves, for one of the best ways of learning a thing is trying to teach it. "What I tell you in secret that tell ye upon the housetops." He was the wisest of teachers because he was the most compassionate.

And I may add here, that we know this to be the case with some of us, because he has been very tender in teaching us. Some of our teachers wanted us to learn the big doctrines first, and they did not like it because we could not at once see all the sublime truths of election and predestination. Certain of the old standards who are very orthodox, sixteen, if not eighteen, ounces to the pound, expect all new-born babes to eat meat at once; as soon as ever a person is converted, they would have him know all about the sublapsarian and supralapsarian schemes; and if he does not they say, "He is a doubtful character. He is not sound." Ah, but that is not the manner of our Lord, who is tender over us as a nurse with a child. He begins by working into our experience a few elementary truths, and then when we get farther on we find out something more, and as we are able to bear it he reveals to us his truth. He does not teach us experimentally all at once any more than he taught the apostles all at once; but by degrees he illuminates our minds. Our poor blind eyes could not bear sunlight at first, and therefore he gives us just a little starlight, then moonlight, then twilight, then afterwards he brings us into the high unclouded noon of the clear revelation of his love, which is to be our portion in heaven. Our sight through a glass darkly is purposely made dim to suit our feeble vision, for he has compassion on the ignorant. I speak, then, to everyone here who feels himself to be theologically backward, and not to know much about the things of God's word: never mind, dear brother; never mind, dear sister; come to Jesus Christ and trust him, and he will teach you as well as save you, and if you are now untaught and unlearned, do not hold back because of that, but come forward with all hopefulness. If you do not know one letter in the alphabet from another, and if you do not know one doctrine of the word of God, except that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, yet come and welcome to your great High Priest, for he will have compassion on the ignorant.

But my time is almost gone, and I want to speak a word upon the last point, which is, that he will have compassion upon those that are out of the way. "Out of the way:" out of the right way, the narrow

way, the happy way, the only way. Who are these people? Some are out of the way because they never were in it and never knew it. They have heard of it, perhaps, a little, but they have never tried it by setting one foot therein. You are not church-goers or chapel-goers, for you are altogether out of the way. You are not hearers of the gospel, not people who even practise a form of prayer; you are avowedly out of the way. Harken then, while I tell you that Jesus can have compassion on those that are out of the way. Many are in a very emphatic sense out-of-the-way sinners. They have gone to such extravagances that they are out of the way of common morality, and quite startle their careless comrades. Even those who have no religion yet say, "Well, now, you go beyond me. You are an out-of-the-way fellow." "I drink sometimes," says one man, "but as for you, you are an out-of-the-way drinker." "I," says another—"well, I—I make no pretensions to be very precise, but still I draw a line somewhere. As for you, you go beyond all bounds, and are an out-of-the-way fellow altogether." Well, I have to say to-night that my Lord Jesus will have compassion on you out-of-the-way sinners. However far you have gone, only turn to him, for pardon is freely published. Forsake your sin to-night, and come to Jesus' feet and cast yourself there and say, "I will not begone till thou renew me and deliver me from the guilt and bondage of my sin." He can do it, yea he will do it, for he can have compassion on out-of-the-way sinners.

Perhaps I am addressing some who were once nominally in the way. You were members of a church years ago. Where are you now? The church may well disown you, and you may well disown the church, for you are a disgrace to it. What have you been doing this morning? How do you spend your Sabbaths? What is your conduct during the week? I would speak personally to those of you who were once professors and are now prodigals. You were with the Methodists, were you not, when you were in the country? You have nothing to do with them now. Ah, yes, before you entered the army you had some idea of religion, and loved in some respects the service of your mother's God, but you have forgotten it since you have been in the barrack-room. I know how it is with many: they are very willing to go with Christ when he wears his golden girdle and his starry crown, and walks out on sunshiny days; but to bear a cross and follow him through the mocking mob is quite another matter, and therefore they go out of the way. Backslider, do not despair, the great High Priest of our profession will have compassion on you: only return to him. Still has he the greatest pity for the greatest wanderer. He rejoices more over one lost sheep that he has found than over ninety and nine that went not astray.

And oh, dear child of God, here is a word for you, for, it may be, you feel to-night as if you were out of the way. You are not enjoying religion as you once did. When the hymn is sung your heart does not make music, and when prayer is offered you feel as if you could not pray. Despair not, for he can have compassion on you. You are ignorant, for who among us is there that is not ignorant? He who knows most of Christ knows very little. We are all ignorant, and he has compassion on us all. And we are all out of the way in some measure; the best child of God on earth is not perfect. I did hear from a brother that he was perfect, but I did not believe him, nor think any the better

of him for his being so self-conceited. I thought when he said he was perfect that I could see an imperfection in his eyesight; and, if I had looked a little closer, I should probably have found another in his tongue. Better far to pray, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep. Seek thy servant, for I do not forget thy commandments." The Good Shepherd will have compassion upon us, and bind up our wounds, and bear with our weaknesses and follies; therefore let us come to him anew and trust him more and more. Let us come to him as he is now, enthroned in the highest heavens, and say, "Jesus, we have heard that thou hast compassion on the ignorant and those that are out of the way, and such are we. Behold, we trust ourselves with thee." Trembling believer, be not slow to draw near, for his loving heart is unable to refuse you. If you will trust yourselves with the Saviour, he cannot betray or deceive your trust. Only do that and your faith will have power over the sacred heart of the Crucified One. You know if a child trusts you—if it is only to buy a penny toy—you do not like to go home without doing it. You City men, if your little daughter trusted father to buy her something, you would not like to disappoint her. Well, and God, our blessed Saviour, cannot, will not disappoint his trustful children. If we can trust him with our souls we have a hold upon him which he will not shake off, but he will bless us—yea, he will bless us eternally. God help you to trust him now, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hebrews iv.

14—16; v.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—388, 537; and "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by," 198 in "Flowers and Fruits of Sacred Song."

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THE REASON WHY MANY CANNOT FIND PEACE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 7TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up."—James iv. 7—10.

WE frequently meet with persons who tell us that they cannot find peace with God. They have been bidden to believe in the Lord Jesus, but they misunderstand the command, and, while they think they are obeying it, they are really unbelievers; hence they miss the way of peace. They attempt to pray, but their petitions are not answered, and their supplications yield them no comfort whatever, for neither their faith nor their prayer is accepted of the Lord. Such persons are described by James in the third verse of the chapter now open before us—"Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss." We cannot be content to see seekers in this wretchedness, and hence we endeavour to comfort them, instructing them again and again in the great gospel precept, "Believe and live"; yet as a rule they get no further, but linger in an unsatisfactory condition. They assure us that they believe in Jesus, but we see none of the fruits of faith in them, neither can they themselves say that they derive any spiritual benefit from the faith which they profess. Now I fear that comfort is misplaced in these cases. When we have endeavoured to cheer such people, I fear we may have been flaying over a wound which needs a sharp knife rather than a soft bandage, a keen lancet rather than a healing liniment. We shall try at this time to show certain uneasy souls why they do not obtain peace, and what they must be brought to by the Holy Spirit before they can rightly claim that they are saved. Though our words may be somewhat caustic they will be uttered in loving faithfulness, and may the Lord our God make them effectual to the ending of the inner strife and the establishment of settled peace.

I fear that many who profess to be Christians are in a very questionable condition: they have no joy of their faith and no success in their
Nos. 1,408-9.

prayers. Whether they are Christians or not is a moot point, and the practical James does not waste time in discussing the doubtful question, but speaks to them from both sides of their apparent condition. In his previous chapters he calls them "my brethren," and even "my beloved brethren," and he draws no line of demarcation when he afterwards addresses them as "sinners," whose hands must be cleansed, and as "double-minded" persons, whose hearts must be purified. They were both these: they were professedly brethren, but they were at heart unchaste to Christ; they indulged in grievous sins of contention and malice, and their hearts were divided between the love of sin and the hope of salvation. We will not, therefore, raise personal questions, or try to discriminate where certainty is hard to reach, but we will speak to suspicious characters without determining whether they are believers or not. If such persons claim to be called brethren, we will address them as such, but it will be in a sentence like this, "My brethren, such things ought not to be." On the other hand, we will use no condemnatory title, but leave the question between God and each man's own conscience. We will go to the root of the matter, and set forth the reason for the lack of peace and salvation of which some complain. May the sacred Spirit help us to point out the fatal failure which keeps the soul from rest. If any man be not sure that he is in Christ, he ought not to be easy one moment until he is so. Dear friend, without the fullest confidence as to your saved condition, you have no right to be at ease, and I pray you may never be so. This is a matter too important to be left undecided. Instantly should every man of prudence make assurance doubly sure; and bind all things fast that he may find them fast for eternity—for eternity I say, for thus saith the Lord. Never risk your souls, for your souls are yourselves, your real selves, and nothing can make up for their loss. If you lose your own souls, it will be no recompense to have gained the whole world. Be careful, then, leave nothing insecure, carefully measure and weigh every important step; consider and examine, lest being so near to the kingdom any of you should seem to come short of it. To help you to a settled peace, let me first of all urge upon you to obey *the comprehensive command* of our text—"Submit yourselves therefore to God"; and then, secondly, let me further press upon you to practise the *other precepts which follow*, such as "Resist the devil," "Draw nigh to God," "Cleanse your hands," "Purify your hearts," and "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep;" and "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord."

I. First hearken to THE COMPREHENSIVE COMMAND—"Submit yourselves therefore to God." According to the connection, the fighting spirit within many men shows that they have not submitted themselves to God; lusting, envy, strife, contention, jealousy, anger, all these things declare that the heart is not submissive, but remains violently self-willed and rebellious. Those who are still wrathful, proud, contentious, and selfish, are evidently unsubdued. There are some men to whom the very idea of submission is distasteful; they will be *sub* to no one, but wish to be their own gods, and a law unto themselves. "Submit" is a galling word to them. They say in their hearts, "Who is ~~the~~ Lord that I should obey his voice?" They are willing enough to accept his favours, willing enough after their fashion to say "Thank God," but

as to submission, they will have none of it, it suits not their high mightiness. They strive for the mastery, they push for the front place, aiming to advance their own interests, and make great I to be lord paramount. The apostle quietly indicates in the words of our text that many Christian professors need to submit, for at present their unhumbled nature leads them to lustings and strivings, and effectually prevents their asking so as to receive at the Lord's hands.

A want of submission is no new or rare fault in mankind; ever since the fall it has been the root of all sin. When the heart submits to God in sincerity the work of grace is begun, and when it submits perfectly the work is complete; but for this divine grace must display its power, for the heart is obstinate and rebellious. From the moment when our mother Eve stretched out her hand to pluck the forbidden fruit, and her husband joined her in setting up the human will against the divine, the sons of men have universally been guilty of a want of conformity to the will of God. They choose their own way, and will not submit their wills; they think their own thoughts, and will not submit their understandings; they love earthly things, and will not submit their affections. Man wants to be his own law, and his own master. This is abominable, since we are not our own makers; for "it is he that hath made us and not we ourselves." The Lord should have supremacy over us, for our existence depends on his will. I have heard much of the rights of man: but it were well also to consider the rights of God, which are the first, highest, surest, and most solemn rights in the universe, and lie at the base of all other rights. The Lord has an absolute right to the beings whom he has fashioned, and it is shameful that the great mass of men seem never even to recollect that he exists, much less to ask themselves what is due to him. Alas, great God, how art thou a stranger even in the world which thou hast thyself made! Thy creatures, who could not see if thou hadst not given them eyes, look everywhere except to thee. Creatures who could not think if thou hadst not given them minds, think of all things except thee; and beings who could not live if thou didst not keep them in being, forget thee utterly, or if they remember thine existence, and see thy power, are foolhardy enough to become thy foes! The hemlock of sin grows in the furrows of opposition to God. When the Lord is pleased to turn the hearts of opposers to the obedience of the truth, it is an evident token of salvation; in fact, it is the dawn of salvation itself. To submit to God is to find rest.

The rule of God is so beneficial that he ought readily to be obeyed. He never commands us to do that which, in the long run, can be injurious to us; nor does he forbid us anything which can be to our real advantage. Our God is so kind, so wise, so full of loving forethought, that it must ever be to our best interest to follow his lead. Even if we could be left to choose our own way, and were under no bonds of duty, it would be wise and prudent to choose the way of the Lord, for it is the path of pleasantness and safety. Beloved, the Lord is far too great to have any need to deal unjustly, or unkindly, with his creatures; indeed, he is so great that he cannot desire any personal advantage from his government, but he condescends to govern us because without his rule and guidance we should be utterly undone. It is for our good that like a father in his family he commands us this or forbids us the other.

It is wanton cruelty to ourselves when we break away from the liberty with which Jesus makes us free to place ourselves under the tyranny of selfishness and the baser passions of the mind. It is madness to forsake the honourable service of the great King to become the slave of Satan. O that men would submit themselves unto God and be willing to be blest.

All resistance against God must, from the necessity of the case, be futile. Common sense teaches that rebellion against omnipotence is both insanity and blasphemy. The Lord's purpose must stand, and his pleasure must be done; his power will assuredly crush all opposition, and it is idle to raise it. Why, then, should a man contend against his Master? Wisdom as well as righteousness call upon him to submit himself unto God.

And then let it always be known that submission to God is absolutely necessary to salvation. A man is not saved until he bows before the supreme majesty of God. He may say, "I believe in Jesus," but if he goes on to follow out his own desires, and to gratify his own passions, he is a mere pretender, a wolf in the clothing of a sheep. Dead faith will save no man; it is not even as good as the faith of devils, for they "*believe and tremble*," and these men believe in a fashion which makes them brazen in their iniquity. No, salvation means being saved from the domination of self and sin; salvation means being made to long after likeness to God, being helped by divine grace to reach to that likeness, and living after the mind and will of the Most High. Submission to God is the salvation which we preach, not a mere deliverance from eternal burnings, but deliverance from present rebellion, deliverance from the sin which is the fuel of those flames unquenchable. There must be conformity to the eternal laws of the universe, and according to these God must be first and man must bow to him: nothing can be right till this is done. *Submit* is a command which in every case must be obeyed, or no peace or salvation will be found.

Now, it is generally in this matter of submission that the stumbling-block lies in the way of souls when seeking peace with God. It keeps them unsaved, and as I have already said, necessarily so, because a man who is not submissive to God is not saved; he is not saved from rebellion, he is not saved from pride, he is still evidently an unsaved man, let him think whatever he will of himself. Perhaps by a few personal remarks I may hit upon the reason why certain of my hearers cannot get the peace which the gospel so freely sets before them. There is a want of submission in some point or other. Now, in the saved man there is and must be a full and unconditional submission *to the law of God*. He must consent unto the law that it is good. If your mind has aforetime cavilled against the law, you must end the contest, for it is impossible that you should be right while you quarrel with the law of righteousness. If you set yourself up to be a judge of the law, you judge the lawgiver himself, and what is this but the blackest presumption? Traced to its real meaning, the thought of judging the law is treason, and would dethrone God and reign in his stead. How sad to see a sinful mortal criticizing the perfect law of his Maker! Dare you do this? If you say in your heart, "He is too strict in marking sin, and too severe in punishing it," what is this but condemning your Judge? If you say, "He calls me to

account for idle words, and even for sins of ignorance, and this is hard," what is this but to call your Lord unjust? Should the law be amended to suit your desires? Should its requirements be accommodated to ease your indolence? If you ask for this you are not saved, for a saved person delights in the law of God after the inward man; he says of it, "the law is holy"; though he weeps as he adds, "but I am carnal, sold under sin." He honours the law as he bows before it and confesses his shortcomings.

Yes, and before a man can have peace with God he must submit himself *to the sentence of the law*. Though that law in its severity searches the reins and tries the heart, arraigns us before the bar of God, and pronounces sentence upon us, we must own it to be just. Grace working in the heart brings the penitent to plead guilty to the sin, and to own that the penalty is deserved. In my own case I unreservedly own that when the law in my conscience condemned me to hell, I dared not lift a finger nor even think a thought by way of disputing the sentence. The conscience is not divinely quickened, nor the soul renewed, nor the man saved, unless he cries, "I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight, that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." You must submit yourselves to the righteousness and severity of God, or he will resist you as he doth all the proud. There can be no pardon for a man unless he will honour the law by hearty submission. If your plea be "not guilty," you will be committed for trial according to justice, but you cannot be forgiven by mercy. You are in a hopeless position; God himself cannot meet you upon that ground, for he cannot admit that the law is unrighteous and its penalty too heavy. The Lord cannot be at peace with you while you defy his law. He declares that you are guilty and you dispute this declaration, hence between you and himself there is a quarrel which never can be ended till you own your error and beg for pardon. He can deal with you in mercy when you once stand where mercy can meet with you, namely, in the sinner's place, but if you say "I am not guilty," and begin to vindicate or excuse yourself, you are on a ground which the Lord cannot recognise. If you are professedly righteous how can the Lord deal with you except in justice? And if he deal with you in justice he will readily enough summon his witnesses, and prove you guilty, and condemn you everlastingly. Submit, then, unto God, and say, "Guilty, Lord: I throw down the weapons of my rebellion, and own that I stand condemned before thee, and if saved at all it must be by thy free forgiveness, by thine unmerited mercy, by thy boundless love."

A man must next submit himself *to the plan of salvation by grace alone*. God meets the sinner on the footing of grace. "I cannot exonerate you," he seems to say, "but I can forgive you; I cannot tolerate your denial of guilt, but if you confess your sin I am faithful and just to forgive you your sin, and to save you from all unrighteousness." Now, are you willing, my dear hearer, are you sure that you are willing to be saved by grace alone and to owe your deliverance from sin and its punishment entirely to the free favour of God? Will you yield to that? I trust you will. But there are some who will not, for they go about to establish their own righteousness and do not submit themselves to the righteous-

ness of God. They think that so much chapel-going, church-going, sermon-hearing, prayer-meeting attending, Bible reading, and so on, will certainly work up something like a claim upon God. O, sirs, have done with claims. If you come with anything like a claim the Lord will not touch the case at all, for you have no claim, and the pretence of one would be an insult to God. If you fancy you have demands upon God, go into the court of justice and plead them, but the sentence is certain to be against you, for by the deeds of the law no flesh can be justified. Try the other way. Come to God with no claim, and appeal to his pity, saying, "Lord, I cry for mercy. Gladly will I accept thy free grace if thou wilt but give it me." You will be accepted on that footing; for the Lord is gracious and casts out none who come to him confessing their sins.

You must also submit yourselves *to God's way of saving you through an atoning sacrifice* and by means of your personal faith in that sacrifice. You must receive his Son as divine, and you must believe in that atoning blood which was shed for many for the remission of sins. Surely there should be no difficulty about surrendering the mind to this. Salvation by the great Mediator is such a delightful way of salvation, so just to God, so safe to man, that we ought to clap our hands for very joy to think that such a royal road to heaven is opened for us. What say you, dear hearers? Does the Holy Ghost incline you to trust in the blood of Jesus?

And then there must be a full submission *to God in the matter of giving up every sin*. Numbers of persons pray for mercy, but they continue in their sins. Such men cannot be saved, because salvation is salvation *from* sin—not *in* sin. How can we be saved from sin if we are its slaves? If you come to God and cry, "Lord, deliver me, and have mercy upon me," and yet you practise private drinking, and tipple yourselves into semi-drunkenness, how can you be saved? If you keep on cheating in business, or telling lies, or indulge a malicious or angry temper in the family, or are proud and unkind, selfish and miserly, how can you be saved? I warn you, sirs, that faith itself cannot save you while these things are so, for if your faith were a saving faith it would rescue you from these evils. This, indeed, is salvation, namely, deliverance from the power and habit of sin. Many prayers are semi-hypocritical; there is a kind of sincerity about them, but there is no whole-hearted desire after holiness, and therefore they will never gain a comfortable answer from God. O seeker, art thou willing to give up every sin? Come, drunkard, thou prayest to be forgiven, but art thou willing to abjure the intoxicating cup once for all? Thou, my brother, askest to be pardoned; it is well, but art thou at the same time desirous to cease from your transgressions? Yes or no! Art thou anxious to search out every false way, and abandon it as soon as it is discovered? Dost thou wish to have a holy, truthful, godly tongue? Dost thou long to be saved from every lust and secret vice? If so, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, thou art already saved; thy sigh to be delivered from evil is the commencement of the work of sanctification. But if thou dost say, "I would be saved from every wrong way except my one indulgence, my one secret iniquity," then thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity; thy prayers will come back into thy bosom unanswered, and thy pretended faith in Christ will condemn

thee. Thy fancied faith cannot save thee, seeing thou huggest thy sin. A certain man has been accustomed to eat of a certain dish which is bad for his health, and when he calls in a physician their talk is after this fashion: "If you trust in me," says the doctor, "I can cure you." "Yes," replies the patient, "I do trust in you heartily." The doctor proceeds, "That dainty of yours must be given up, for it is the cause of your disease, and so long as you eat it you must suffer in consequence." "Well, doctor," he says, "I trust in you, but I cannot give up my favourite food." Is it not apparent to everybody that he is not trusting in the physician at all? Even so when a man declares, "I trust in Christ to save me from sin," and then continues in his wickedness: he mocks the Good Physician, and is in danger of sudden destruction. Either you must cast sin out of your heart or it will keep you out of heaven. This point must be insisted on: receiving Christ is impossible without at the same time renouncing sin.

If we would be saved there must be submission *to the Lord as to all his teachings*; a very necessary point in this age, for a multitude of persons, who appear to be religious, judge the Scriptures instead of allowing the Scriptures to judge them. Hear, O ye wise men, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Submission to the infallible authority of the inspired word is absolutely required of every disciple of Jesus, but this age delights in the opposite spirit. Even some of those who call themselves ministers of the gospel persistently indulge a spirit which is precisely the reverse of the childlike faith which saves the soul. They industriously endeavour to excite rebellion against the teachings of Christ, and cry it up under the name of "honest doubt." They do not wish men to believe, but to *think*, and their gospel, practically, is, "Doubt, and do not be baptized, and you shall be saved." Shame upon them! Now our gospel is, "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved"; and we are content to teach what Jesus Christ our Lord told his disciples to preach to all nations. If I will never yield my reason, if I will never believe what I cannot understand, if I will carry an open knife about with me to cut and hack at texts of Scripture, if I will not sit at Jesus' feet with Mary, but want him to sit at my feet that I may tell him what his religion ought to be, and what he ought to have said, how can I be saved? If, after all, we are personally infallible, and are to spend all our days in selecting our opinions, how can we know Christ? If instead of yielding my judgment to the plain teachings of my Lord I must needs revise his doctrines, how can I be saved? If I have not submitted my intellect to God, what peace can there be? Mark this well, ye wise young men who know so much more than your fathers, and are too intellectual to reverence your fathers' God.

And, now, I must ask another question of you who desire peace and cannot find it: have you submitted yourselves *to the providential arrangements of God*? I know persons who often sit in this house of prayer who have a quarrel with God. He took away a beloved object, and they not only thought him unkind and cruel at the time, but they think so still. Like a child in a fit of the sulks, they cast an evil eye upon the great Father. They are not at peace, and never will be till they have owned

the Lord's supremacy, and ceased from their rebellious thoughts. If they were in a right state of heart they would thank the Lord for their sharp trials, and consent to his will, as being assuredly right. I fear that unsubmission on this point affects a great number of persons. They cannot succeed in business, and therefore they are out of temper with God. He knows very well that they are not fit to be made rich, and could not be trusted with a large business; and, therefore, he does not grant their suicidal desires. Some men would never win the race of life if they had an ounce of gold to carry; the only hope for their running at all lies in keeping them unencumbered. We know, also, thoughtful young men who cannot pursue their studies because of failing health: they want to be famous, but they are not strong enough to continue their work for the examination, and so they are vexed with the Lord. Or, it may be, they have less talent than ambition, and they rebel because their Maker has not given them intellects as capacious as that of Solomon. Let them be satisfied to use the talent they have, and cease from contending with their Creator. Many men have a sort of private pique with providence, and sit down like Jonah under their withered gourd and mutter, "We do well to be angry even unto death." Now, if such be the case with any before me, I would say to them,—leave off quarrelling with your God. What can be the use of it? The very best and wisest thing for you is to make friends with him, and let his will be yours. After all he deals well with you, if you would but see it. Depend upon it there is something to be made out of the position you occupy: gain will come to you out of all those losses, profit will arise even from those sad bereavements, if you will stand still and see the salvation of God. Acquaint yourselves with God and be at peace, for thereby good shall come unto you; for unless you do this you may say, "I believe," but you have no faith in God. How can a man believe in God when he charges God with treating him wrongly? Faith begets resignation and submission, but where there is strife and enmity, unbelief is still supreme. Until you submit yourselves to God it cannot be well with your souls, for he resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

This is the long and the short of it: you must, as a guilty sinner, cast yourself at God's feet and say, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, and have mercy upon me in thine own way. I dictate not to thee, but I implore thy grace? I humbly beg forgiveness, be pleased to pity me. I yield up myself to thee, asking thee to make me holy. I do from my very heart give up the love of sin. I fear I shall sin, help me to loathe myself when I do so; make me what thou wilt have me to be, and then deal as thou wilt with me. I make no terms nor conditions; mine is an unconditional surrender. Only for thy mercy's sake renew me, make me thy child and save me. As thou biddest me trust thy Son, I do trust him. "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." You will have peace when your heart is brought to this point. At present your wound does not heal, because it needs washing, for the grit of pride has fallen into it and is causing a wretched irritation. When pride is gone and you are fully submissive then shall the wound heal and your broken bones shall rejoice. I am not asking you to submit to a priest, I am not asking you to submit to a mere man, but I speak very earnestly when I say, "Submit yourselves unto God": it is natural, it is right; it is good in itself, and fraught

with the highest good to you. Submission is essential to salvation, therefore bow before the Lord at once. May the Lord bend that stubborn will and conquer that wayward heart. Yield yourselves unto God, and pray to be delivered from future rebellion. If you have submitted, do so yet more completely, for so shall you be known to be Christians when you submit yourselves unto God. If you will not submit, your faith is a lie, your hope is a delusion, your prayer is an insult, your peace is presumption, your end will be despair. Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. "But God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses."

II. But now, secondly, having thus spoken upon the great duty of submission, let us consider the other and FOLLOWING PRECEPTS. I think I am not suspicious without reason when I express a fear that the preaching which has lately been very common, and in some respects very useful, of "only believe and you shall be saved," has sometimes been altogether mistaken by those who have heard it. Cases occur in which young persons go on living light, frivolous, giddy, and even wicked lives, and yet they assert that they believe in Jesus Christ. When you come to examine them a little you find that their belief in Christ means that they believe that he has saved them, although everybody who knows their character can see clearly that they are not saved at all: now, what is their faith but the belief of a lie? They are living just as they did live, and hence it is clear that they are not saved from their former foolish conversation, nor from their bad tempers, nor from their old sins; and yet they try to persuade themselves that they are saved. Now, true faith never believes falsehoods: presumption lives upon lies, but faith will only feed on truth. My faith does not teach me to believe I am saved when straight before my very eyes I have the evidence that I am not saved, since I am living in the very sin I pretend to be saved from. Though we would not for a moment cast a doubt upon the doctrine of justification by faith and free salvation, we must also preach more and more that parallel truth, "Ye must be born again." We must bring to the front the grand old word which has been thrown into the background by some evangelists, namely, "Repent." Repentance is as essential to salvation as faith: indeed there is no faith without repentance except the faith which needs to be repented of. A dry-eyed faith will never see the kingdom of God. A holy loathing for sin always attends upon a childlike faith in the Sin-bearer. Where the root grace of faith is found other graces will grow from it.

Now notice how the Spirit of God, after having bidden us submit, goes on to show what else is to be done. He calls for a brave resistance of the devil. "*Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*" The business of salvation is not all passive, the soul must be aroused to active warfare. I am to fall into the arms of Christ, that he may save me, and trust in him entirely; but when I depend upon him I receive life, and the very first effort of that life is to smite with all its might the adversary of Christ and of my own soul. I am not only to contend with sin, but with the spirit which fomented and suggests sin. I am to resist the secret spirit of evil as well as its outward acts. "Oh," saith one, "I cannot give up an inveterate habit." Sir, you must give it up; you

must resist the devil or perish. "But I have been so long in it," cries the man. Yes, but if you truly trust Christ your first effort will be to fight against the evil habit. Ay, and if it is not a habit merely, nor an impulse, but if your danger lies in the existence of a cunning spirit who is armed at all points, and both strong and subtle, yet you must not yield, but resolve to resist to the death, cheered by the gracious promise that he will flee from you. You shall in the name of Jesus overcome temptation, master evil habit, and escape from bondage: only strike for freedom and disdain the chain of sin. If you are to have peace with God there must be war with Satan; you cannot rest in your spirit and know the peace which faith gives unless you wage war to the knife against every evil and against the patron and prince of evil, even Satan. Are you ready for this? You cannot have peace unless you are.

Next the apostle writes, "*Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.*" He who believes in Christ sincerely will be much in prayer; yet there are some who say, "We want to be saved," but they neglect prayer. They cannot make out how it is that they have no enjoyment of religion; but why need they be puzzled? Ask your neglected closet, ask your own heart, how you can be happy and prosperous and blessed in divine things if you do not pray. Recollect that the mere saying of prayers is not praying. The essence of prayer lies in the heart drawing near to God: and it can do that without words. Prayer is the feeling that God is present, and the desire of the soul to come near to him, so as to own his influence, to know his love, to feel his power, and to be conformed to his will. This kind of praying can be continued by the power of God's Holy Spirit all the day long. We must know something of this. "Behold he prayeth" is one of the first marks of a saved soul; and if you think that by some momentary act of faith which you suppose you exercised you are therefore saved, while your heart remains at a distance from God, prayerless and careless, you are fatally deceived. Such is not the teaching of Scripture, and there is no warrant for it in the promises of God. If prayer be utterly neglected, the soul is dead.

The next precept is, "*Cleanse your hands, ye sinners.*" What! does the word of God tell sinners to cleanse their hands and purify their hearts? Yes, it does. Some brother whispers "Ah, that is Arminianism." Who art thou that repliest against God's word? If such teaching is in this inspired book, how dare we question it? It comes with a "thus saith the Lord,"—"Cleanse your hands, ye sinners." When a man comes to God and says, "I am willing and anxious to be saved, and I trust Christ to save me," and yet he keeps his dirty black hands exercised in filthy actions, doing what he knows is wrong, does he expect God to hear him? Do I need spend even so many as a half-dozen words to show that this man does not believe and is not really honest before the Most High? "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners." Can you ask God to be at peace with you while your hands grasp your sins with loving embrace and are full of bribes, or are foul with lust, or are smiting with the fist of anger and wrath? If you do the devil's work with your hands, do not expect the Lord to fill them with his blessing. It cannot be, you must break off your sins by righteousness, and as Paul shook off the viper from his hand into the fire, so must you. By the power of faith, if it be a real faith, you will be able to purge your outward life. Why, when men talk

about being spiritual, and are not even decently moral, it makes us sick to hear them. How dare they talk about being Christians when they do not live as well as Mohammedans or heathens? Oh ye dogs, howling out your shame, what portion have you among the children so long as you bite and devour and love your filthiness? It is idle to talk about salvation while sin is hugged to the heart with both hands. Away with such hypocrisy!

Then it is added, "*Purify your hearts, ye double-minded.*" Can they do this? Assuredly not by themselves, but still in order to peace with God there must be so much purification of the heart that it shall no longer be double-minded. He who would have salvation must seek it with all his heart, must so seek it that he is resolved to give up anything, and to endure anything, so that he may but be rescued from sin. "*Purify your hearts, ye double-minded.*" Get rid of that leering eye of yours towards uncleanness, and that cross eye which squints towards worldly gain; for till your whole heart cries after the Most High he will not hear you. When you can say with David, "My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God," you shall find the Lord. When you cease trying to serve two masters, and submit yourselves unto God, he will bless you, but not till then. I believe that this touches the centre of the mischief in many of those hearts which fail to reach peace; they have not given up sin, they are not whole-hearted after salvation.

Then the Lord bids us "*be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.*" I grieve to say that I have met with persons who say, "I cannot find peace, I cannot get salvation," and talk very prettily in that way; but yet outside the door they are giggling one with another, as if it were matter of amusement. The Sabbath day is spent in vain, idle, frivolous conversation—seriousness they do not seem even to have felt. The whole matter appears to be a mere sport. Some converts seem to jump into religion as people do into a bath, and jump out again about as fast; they never weigh the matter, they have no thought, no sorrow for sin, no humiliation before God. Stop that laughter if you are an unsaved soul—for decency's sake, stop that laughter. For you to laugh whilst in danger of being lost sounds to me as ghastly and as grim as if the fiends of hell were to set up a theatre and act a comedy in the pit. What right have you with laughter while sin is unforgiven, while God is angry with you? Nay, go to him in fitter form and fashion, or he will refuse your prayers. Be serious, begin to think of death, and judgment, and wrath to come. These are not trifles, sirs, nor things to make sport about, neither is true religion a thing that is to be attended to as easily as when one snaps his finger and says, "Heigh presto! Quick. It's done!" By no manner of means. If you are saved your mind is solemnly impressed by eternal realities and you are serious about matters of life and death; the very thought of sin pains you, and since you meet with it in your daily life you have cause for daily humbling, and are afflicted because of it. Many, I fear, fail to get peace because it is not a solemn matter at all, they trifle with it as if it were a game for boys and girls to play at, and not for the heart and spirit to enter upon with deep concern.

Then the Lord sums up his precepts by saying, "*Humble yourselves in the sight of God.*" With that I close. There must be a deep and lowly prostration of the spirit before God. If you happen to have a boy who

shows a high rebellious spirit against you, and you have chastened him for it, and yet he stands out, you tell him that there must be a humbling of himself before you can forgive him. If he is a wise child, and wishes to escape your anger, he makes a dutiful confession, acknowledges that he was wrong, and appeals to your love, and you freely pardon him: but in many who pretend to come to God there is no humbling. They do not own that they ever did anything particularly wrong, and they do not care if they did: still they hear there is such a thing as believing in Jesus, and they profess to believe, not because there is any need for it, as they think, but for fashion sake. Ah, sirs, Jesus Christ did not come to heal the whole, but the sick, neither did he die to bind up those who are not broken, nor to make alive those who were never killed. There must be in you, and may God give to you, a brokenness of spirit; a broken and a contrite heart he will not despise.

If your heart has never been broken, how can he bind it up? If it was never wounded, how can he heal it? These are weighty matters, and I speak them weightily lest anyone among you should be deceived. God help you to cry, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

This is the way of salvation, that ye believe in Jesus Christ whom God hath sent. But remember that he saves us *from* our sins, not *in* our sins. Faith in Jesus Christ does save and will save all who have it, but it is by purging out sin. It assures us that we are pardoned, and thus it makes us love the Christ by whom we are forgiven: this love leads us to abhor ourselves for our sins, and we endeavour to purify ourselves from them by his Spirit. Faith without works is dead, being alone; and though a man is justified by faith and not by works, and by faith alone, and not even in part by his works, yet the faith which saves is a faith which produces good works, and leads into the way of holiness. He who doth not seek after righteousness and true holiness, let him pretend what he may, is dead while he lives. The Lord have mercy upon you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—James iii., iv. 1—12.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—907, 641, 119 (Song II).

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE SHORTEST OF THE SEVEN CRIES.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 14TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.”—John xix. 28.

It was most fitting that every word of our Lord upon the cross should be gathered up and preserved. As not a bone of him shall be broken, so not a word shall be lost. The Holy Spirit took special care that each of the sacred utterances should be fittingly recorded. There were, as you know, seven of those last words, and seven is the number of perfection and fulness; the number which blends the three of the infinite God with the four of complete creation. Our Lord in his death-cries, as in all else, was perfection itself. There is a fulness of meaning in each utterance which no man shall be able fully to bring forth, and when combined they make up a vast deep of thought, which no human line can fathom. Here, as everywhere else, we are constrained to say of our Lord, “Never man spake like this man.” Amid all the anguish of his spirit his last words prove him to have remained fully self-possessed, true to his forgiving nature, true to his kingly office, true to his filial relationship, true to his God, true to his love of the written word, true to his glorious work, and true to his faith in his Father.

As these seven sayings were so faithfully recorded, we do not wonder that they have frequently been the subject of devout meditation. Fathers and confessors, preachers and divines have delighted to dwell upon every syllable of these matchless cries. These solemn sentences have shone like the seven golden candlesticks or the seven stars of the Apocalypse, and have lighted multitudes of men to him who spake them. Thoughtful men have drawn a wealth of meaning from them, and in so doing have arranged them into different groups, and placed them under several heads. I cannot give you more than a mere taste of this rich subject, but I have been most struck with two ways of regarding our Lord's last words. First, they teach and confirm many of the doctrines of our holy faith. “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*” is the first. Here is the forgiveness of sin—free forgiveness in answer to the

Saviour's plea. "*To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.*" Here is the safety of the believer in the hour of his departure, and his instant admission into the presence of his Lord. It is a blow at the fable of purgatory which strikes it to the heart. "*Woman, behold thy son!*" This very plainly sets forth the true and proper humanity of Christ, who to the end recognised his human relationship to Mary, of whom he was born. Yet his language teaches us not to worship *her*, for he calls her "woman," but to honour him who in his direst agony thought of her needs and griefs, as he also thinks of all his people, for these are his mother and sister and brother. "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*" is the fourth cry, and it illustrates the penalty endured by our Substitute when he bore our sins, and so was forsaken of his God. The sharpness of that sentence no exposition can fully disclose to us : it is keen as the very edge and point of the sword which pierced his heart. "*I thirst*" is the fifth cry, and its utterance teaches us the truth of Scripture, for all things were accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, and therefore our Lord said, "*I thirst.*" Holy Scripture remains the basis of our faith, established by every word and act of our Redeemer. The last word but one is, "*It is finished.*" There is the complete justification of the believer, since the work by which he is accepted is fully accomplished. The last of his last words is also taken from the Scriptures, and shows where his mind was feeding. He cried, ere he bowed the head which he had held erect amid all his conflict, as one who never yielded, "*Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*" In that cry there is reconciliation to God. He who stood in our stead has finished all his work, and now his spirit comes back to the Father, and he brings us with him. Every word, therefore, you see teaches us some grand fundamental doctrine of our blessed faith. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

A second mode of treating these seven cries is to view them as setting forth the person and offices of our Lord who uttered them. "*Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do*"—here we see the Mediator interceding : Jesus standing before the Father pleading for the guilty. "*Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in paradise*"—this is the Lord Jesus in kingly power, opening with the key of David a door which none can shut, admitting into the gates of heaven the poor soul who had confessed him on the tree. Hail, everlasting King in heaven, thou dost admit to thy paradise whomsoever thou wilt ! Nor dost thou set a time for waiting, but instantly thou dost set wide the gate of pearl ; thou hast all power in heaven as well as upon earth. Then came, "*Woman, behold thy son!*" wherein we see the Son of man in the gentleness of a son caring for his bereaved mother. In the former cry, as he opened Paradise, you saw the Son of God ; now you see him who was verily and truly born of a woman, made under the law ; and under the law you see him still, for he honours his mother and cares for her in the last article of death. Then comes the "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" Here we behold his human soul in anguish, his inmost heart overwhelmed by the withdrawing of Jehovah's face, and made to cry out as if in perplexity and amazement. "*I thirst,*" is his human body tormented by grievous pain. Here you see how the mortal flesh had to share in the agony of the inward spirit. "*It is finished*" is the last word but one, and there you see the perfected Saviour, the Captain

of our salvation, who has completed the undertaking upon which he had entered, finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness. The last expiring word in which he *commended his spirit to his Father*, is the note of acceptance for himself and for us all. As he commends his spirit into the Father's hand, so does he bring all believers nigh to God, and henceforth we are in the hand of the Father, who is greater than all, and none shall pluck us thence. Is not this a fertile field of thought? May the Holy Spirit often lead us to glean therein.

There are many other ways in which these words might be read, and they would be found to be all full of instruction. Like the steps of a ladder or the links of a golden chain, there is a mutual dependence and interlinking of each of the cries, so that one leads to another and that to a third. Separately or in connection our Master's words overflow with instruction to thoughtful minds: but of all save one I must say, "Of which we cannot now speak particularly."

Our text is the shortest of all the words of Calvary; it stands as two words in our language—"I thirst," but in the Greek it is only one. I cannot say that it is short and sweet, for, alas, it was bitterness itself to our Lord Jesus; and yet out of its bitterness I trust there will come great sweetness to us. Though bitter to him in the speaking it will be sweet to us in the hearing,—so sweet that all the bitterness of our trials shall be forgotten as we remember the vinegar and gall of which he drank.

We shall by the assistance of the Holy Spirit try to regard these words of our Saviour in a five-fold light: First, we shall look upon them as **THE ENSIGN OF HIS TRUE HUMANITY**. Jesus said, "I thirst," and this is the complaint of a man. Our Lord is the Maker of the ocean and the waters that are above the firmament: it is his hand that stays or opens the bottles of heaven, and sendeth rain upon the evil and upon the good. "The sea is his, and he made it," and all fountains and springs are of his digging. He poureth out the streams that run among the hills, the torrents which rush adown the mountains, and the flowing rivers which enrich the plains. One would have said, If he were thirsty he would not tell us, for all the clouds and rains would be glad to refresh his brow, and the brooks and streams would joyously flow at his feet. And yet, though he was Lord of all he had so fully taken upon himself the form of a servant and was so perfectly made in the likeness of sinful flesh, that he cried with fainting voice, "I thirst." How truly man he is; he is, indeed, "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh," for he bears our infirmities. I invite you to meditate upon the true humanity of our Lord very reverently, and very lovingly. Jesus was proved to be really man, because he suffered the pains which belong to manhood. Angels cannot suffer thirst. A phantom, as some have called him, could not suffer in this fashion: but Jesus really suffered, not only the more refined pains of delicate and sensitive minds, but the rougher and commoner pangs of flesh and blood. Thirst is a common-place misery, such as may happen to peasants or beggars; it is a real pain, and not a thing of a fancy or a nightmare of dreamland. Thirst is no royal grief, but an evil of universal manhood; Jesus is brother to the poorest and most humble of our race. Our Lord, however, endured thirst to an extreme degree,

for it was the thirst of death which was upon him, and more, it was the thirst of one whose death was not a common one, for "he tasted death for every man." That thirst was caused, perhaps, in part by the loss of blood, and by the fever created by the irritation caused by his four grievous wounds. The nails were fastened in the most sensitive part of the body, and the wounds were widened as the weight of his body dragged the nails through his blessed flesh, and tore his tender nerve. The extreme tension produced a burning feverishness. It was pain that dried his mouth and made it like an oven, till he declared, in the language of the twenty-second psalm, "My tongue cleaveth to my jaws." It was a thirst such as none of us have ever known, for not yet has the death dew condensed upon our brows. We shall perhaps know it in our measure in our dying hour, but not yet, nor ever so terribly as he did. Our Lord felt that grievous drought of dissolution by which all moisture seems dried up, and the flesh returns to the dust of death: this those who know who have commenced to tread the valley of the shadow of death. Jesus, being a man, escaped none of the ills which are allotted to man in death. He is indeed "Immanuel, God with us" everywhere.

Believing this, let us tenderly feel how very near akin to us our Lord Jesus has become. You have been ill, and you have been parched with fever as he was, and then you too have gasped out "I thirst." Your path runs hard by that of your Master. He said, "I thirst," in order that some one might bring him drink, even as you have wished to have a cooling draught handed to you when you could not help yourself. Can you help feeling how very near Jesus is to us when his lips must be moistened with a sponge, and he must be so dependent upon others as to ask drink from their hand? Next time your fevered lips murmur "I am very thirsty," you may say to yourself, "Those are sacred words, for my Lord spake in that fashion." The words, "I thirst," are a common voice in death chambers. We can never forget the painful scenes of which we have been witness, when we have watched the dissolving of the human frame. Some of those whom we loved very dearly we have seen quite unable to help themselves; the death sweat has been upon them and this has been one of the marks of their approaching dissolution, that they have been parched with thirst, and could only mutter between their half-closed lips, "Give me to drink." Ah, beloved, our Lord was a truly man that all our griefs remind us of him: the next time we are thirsty we may gaze upon him; and whenever we see a friend faint and thirsting while dying we may behold our Lord dimly, but truly, mirrored in his members. How near akin the thirsty Saviour is to us; let us love him more and more.

How great the love which led him to such a condescension as this. Do not let us forget the infinite distance between the Lord of glory on his throne and the Crucified dried up with thirst. A river of the water of life, pure as crystal, proceedeth to-day out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, and yet once he condescended to say, "I thirst." He is Lord of fountains and all deeps, but not a cup of cold water was placed to his lips. Oh, if he had at any time said, "I thirst," before his angelic guards, they would surely have emulated the courage of the men of David when they cut their way to the well of Bethlehem that was within the gate, and drew water in jeopardy of their lives. Who among

as would not willingly pour out his soul unto death if he might but give refreshment to the Lord? And yet he placed himself for our sakes into a position of shame and suffering where none would wait upon him, but when he cried, "I thirst," they gave him vinegar to drink. Glorious stoop of our exalted Head! O Lord Jesus, we love thee and we worship thee! We would fain lift thy name on high in grateful remembrance of the depths to which thou didst descend!

While thus we admire his condescension let our thoughts also turn with delight to his sure sympathy: for if Jesus said, "I thirst," then he knows all our frailties and woes. The next time we are in pain or are suffering depression of spirit we will remember that our Lord understands it all, for he has had practical, personal experience of it. Neither in torture of body nor in sadness of heart are we deserted by our Lord; his line is parallel with ours. The arrow which has lately pierced thee, my brother, was first stained with his blood. The cup of which thou art made to drink, though it be very bitter, bears the mark of his lips about its brim. He hath traversed the mournful way before thee, and every footprint thou leavest in the sodden soil is stamped side by side with his footmarks. Let the sympathy of Christ, then, be fully believed in and deeply appreciated, since he said, "I thirst."

Henceforth, also, let us cultivate the spirit of resignation, for we may well rejoice to carry a cross which his shoulders have borne before us. Beloved, if our Master said, "I thirst," do we expect every day to drink of streams from Lebanon? He was innocent, and yet he thirsted; shall we marvel if guilty ones are now and then chastened? If he was so poor that his garments were stripped from him, and he was hung up upon the tree, penniless and friendless, hungering and thirsting, will you henceforth groan and murmur because you bear the yoke of poverty and want? There is bread upon your table to-day, and there will be at least a cup of cold water to refresh you. You are not, therefore, so poor as he. Complain not, then. Shall the servant be above his Master, or the disciple above his Lord? Let patience have her perfect work. You do suffer. Perhaps, dear sister, you carry about with you a gnawing disease which eats at your heart, but Jesus took our sicknesses, and his cup was more bitter than yours. In your chamber let the gasp of your Lord as he said, "I thirst," go through your ears, and as you hear it let it touch your heart and cause you to gird up yourself and say, "Doth he say, 'I thirst'? Then I will thirst with him and not complain, I will suffer with him and not murmur." The Redeemer's cry of "I thirst" is a solemn lesson of patience to his afflicted.

Once again, as we think of this "I thirst," which proves our Lord's humanity, let us resolve to shun no denials, but rather court them that we may be conformed to his image. May we not be half-ashamed of our pleasures when *he* says, "I thirst"? May we not despise our loaded table while *he* is so neglected? Shall it ever be a hardship to be denied the satisfying draught when *he* said, "I thirst." Shall carnal appetites be indulged and bodies pampered when Jesus cried "I thirst"? What if the bread be dry, what if the medicine be nauseous; yet for his thirst there was no relief but gall and vinegar, and dare we complain? For his sake we may rejoice in self-denials, and accept Christ and a crust as all we desire between here and heaven. A Christian living to indulge

the base appetites of a brute beast, to eat and to drink almost to gluttony and drunkenness, is utterly unworthy of the name. The conquest of these appetites, the entire subjugation of the flesh, must be achieved, for before our great Exemplar said, "It is finished," wherein methinks he reached the greatest height of all, he stood as only upon the next lower step to that elevation, and said, "I thirst." The power to suffer for another, the capacity to be self-denying even to an extreme to accomplish so great work for God—this is a thing to be sought after, and must be gained before our work is done, and in this Jesus is before us as an example and our strength.

Thus have I tried to spy out a measure of teaching, by using that old glass for the soul's eye, through which we look upon "I thirst" as the ensign of his true humanity.

II. Secondly, we shall regard these words, "I thirst," as THE TOKEN OF HIS SUFFERING SUBSTITUTION. The great Surety says, "I thirst" because he is placed in the sinner's stead, and he must therefore undergo the penalty of sin for the ungodly. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" points to the anguish of his soul; "I thirst" expresses in part the torture of his body; and they were both needful, because it is written of the God of justice that he is "able to destroy both soul and body in hell," and the pangs that are due to law are of both kinds, touching both heart and flesh. See, brethren, where sin begins, and mark that there it ends. It began with the mouth of appetite, when it was sinfully gratified, and it ends when a kindred appetite is graciously denied. Our first parents plucked forbidden fruit, and by eating sowed the race. Appetite was the door of sin, and therefore in that point of time our Lord was put to pain. With "I thirst" the evil is destroyed and receives its expiation. I saw the other day the emblem of a serpent with its tail in its mouth, and if I carry it a little beyond the artist's intention the symbol may set forth appetite swallowing up itself. A carnal appetite, the satisfaction of the body, the satisfaction of the desire for food, first brought us down under the first Adam, and now the pang of thirst, the denial of what the body craved for, restores us to our place.

Nor is this all. We know from experience that the present effect of sin in every man who indulges in it is thirst of soul. The mind of man is like the daughters of the horseleech, which cry for ever "Give, give." Metaphorically understood, thirst is dissatisfaction, the craving of the mind for something which it has not, but which it pines for. Our Lord says, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink," the thirst being the result of sin in every ungodly man at this moment. Now Christ standing in the stead of the ungodly suffers thirst as a type of his enduring the result of sin. More solemn still is the reflection that according to our Lord's own teaching, thirst will also be the eternal result of sin, for he says concerning the rich glutton, "In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torment," and his prayer, which was denied him, was "Father Abraham, send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." No wonder, if Jesus had not thirsted, every one of us would have thirsted for ever afar off from God, with an impassable gulf between us and heaven. Our sinful tongues, blistered by the fever of passion, must have burned for ever had not his tongue been tormented with this

in our stead. I suppose that the "I thirst" was uttered softly, so that perhaps only one and another who stood near the cross heard it at all; in contrast with the louder cry of "*Lama sabachthani*" and the triumphant shout of "It is finished": but that soft, expiring sigh, "I thirst," has ended for us the thirst which else, insatiably fierce, had preyed upon us throughout eternity. Oh, wondrous substitution of the just for the unjust, of God for man, of the perfect Christ for us guilty, hell-deserving rebels. Let us magnify and bless our Redeemer's name.

It seems to me very wonderful that this "I thirst" should be, as it were, the clearance of it all. He had no sooner said "I thirst," and sipped the vinegar, than he shouted, "It is finished"; and all was over: the battle was fought and the victory won for ever, and our great Deliverer's thirst was the sign of his having smitten the last foe. The flood of his grief had passed the high-water mark, and began to be assuaged. The "I thirst" was the bearing of the last pang; what if I say it was the expression of the fact that his pangs had at last begun to cease, and their fury had spent itself, and left him able to note his lesser pains? The excitement of a great struggle makes men forget thirst and faintness; it is only when all is over that they come back to themselves and note the spending of their strength. The great agony of being forsaken by God was over, and he felt faint when the strain was withdrawn. I like to think of our Lord's saying, "It is finished," directly after he had exclaimed, "I thirst"; for these two voices come so naturally together. Our glorious Samson had been fighting our foes; heaps upon heaps he had slain his thousands, and now like Samson he was sore athirst. He sipped of the vinegar, and he was refreshed, and no sooner has he thrown off the thirst than he shouted like a conqueror, "It is finished," and quitted the field, covered with renown. Let us exult as we see our Substitute going through with his work even to the bitter end, and then with a "*Consummatum est*" returning to his Father, God. O souls, burdened with sin, rest ye here, and resting live.

III. We will now take the text in a third way, and may the Spirit of God instruct us once again. The utterance of "I thirst" brought out A TYPE OF MAN'S TREATMENT OF HIS LORD. It was a confirmation of the Scripture testimony with regard to man's natural enmity to God. According to modern thought man is a very fine and noble creature, struggling to become better. He is greatly to be commended and admired, for his sin is said to be a seeking after God, and his superstition is a struggling after light. Great and worshipful being that he is, truth is to be altered for him, the gospel is to be modulated to suit the tone of his various generations, and all the arrangements of the universe are to be rendered subservient to his interests. Justice must fly the field lest it be severe to so deserving a being; as for punishment, it must not be whispered to his ears polite. In fact, the tendency is to exalt man above God and give him the highest place. But such is not the truthful estimate of man according to the Scriptures: there man is a fallen creature, with a carnal mind which cannot be reconciled to God; a worse than brutish creature, rendering evil for good, and treating his God with vile ingratitude. Alas, man is the slave and the dupe of Satan, and a black-hearted traitor to his God. Did not the prophecies say that man would give to

his incarnate God gall to eat and vinegar to drink? It is done. He came to save, and man denied him hospitality: at the first there was no room for him at the inn, and at the last there was not one cool cup of water for him to drink; but when he thirsted they gave him vinegar to drink. This is man's treatment of his Saviour. Universal manhood, left to itself, rejects, crucifies, and mocks the Christ of God. This was the act too of man at his best, when he is moved to pity; for it seems clear that he who lifted up the wet sponge to the Redeemer's lips, did it in compassion. I think that Roman soldier meant well, at least well for a rough warrior with his little light and knowledge. He ran and filled a sponge with vinegar: it was the best way he knew of putting a few drops of moisture to the lips of one who was suffering so much; but though he felt a degree of pity, it was such as one might show to a dog; he felt no reverence, but mocked as he relieved. We read, "The soldiers also mocked him, offering him vinegar." When our Lord cried, "Eloi, Eloi," and afterwards said, "I thirst," the persons around the cross said, "Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him," mocking him; and, according to Mark, he who gave the vinegar uttered much the same words. He pitied the sufferer, but he thought so little of him that he joined in the voice of scorn. Even when man compassionates the sufferings of Christ, and man would have ceased to be human if he did not, still he scorns him; the very cup which man gives to Jesus is at once scorn and pity, for "the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." See how man at his best mingles admiration of the Saviour's person with scorn of his claims; writing books to hold him up as an example and at the same moment rejecting his deity; admitting that he was a wonderful man, but denying his most sacred mission; extolling his ethical teaching and then trampling on his blood: thus giving him drink, but that drink vinegar. O my hearers, beware of praising Jesus and denying his atoning sacrifice. Beware of rendering him homage and dishonouring his name at the same time.

Alas, my brethren, I cannot say much on the score of man's cruelty to our Lord without touching myself and you. Have *we* not often given him vinegar to drink? Did we not do so years ago before we knew him? We used to melt when we heard about his sufferings, but we did not turn from our sins. We gave him our tears and then grieved him with our sins. We thought sometimes that we loved him as we heard the story of his death, but we did not change our lives for his sake, nor put our trust in him, and so we gave him vinegar to drink. Nor does the grief end here, for have not the best works we have ever done, and the best feelings we have ever felt, and the best prayers we have ever offered, been tart and sour with sin? Can they be compared to generous wine? are they not more like sharp vinegar? I wonder he has ever received them, as one marvels why he received this vinegar; and yet he has received them, and smiled upon us for presenting them. He knew once how to turn water into wine, and in matchless love he has often turned our sour drink-offerings into something sweet to himself, though in themselves, methinks, they have been the juice of sour grapes, sharp enough to set his teeth on edge. We may therefore come before him, with all the rest of our race, when God subdues them to repentance

by his love, and look on him whom we have pierced, and mourn for him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. We may well remember our faults this day,

“We, whose proneness to forget
Thy dear love, on Olivet
Bathed thy brow with bloody sweat ;

“We, whose sins, with awful power,
Like a cloud did o’er thee lower,
In that God-excluding hour ;

“We, who still, in thought and deed,
Often hold the bitter reed
To thee, in thy time of need.”

I have touched that point very lightly because I want a little more time to dwell upon a fourth view of this scene. May the Holy Ghost help us to hear a fourth tuning of the dolorous music, “I thirst.”

IV. I think, beloved friends, that the cry of “I thirst” was THE MYSTICAL EXPRESSION OF THE DESIRE OF HIS HEART—“I thirst.” I cannot think that natural thirst was all he felt. He thirsted for water doubtless, but his soul was thirsty in a higher sense ; indeed, he seems only to have spoken that the Scriptures might be fulfilled as to the offering him vinegar. Always was he in harmony with himself, and his body was always expressive of his soul’s cravings as well as of its own longings. “I thirst” meant that his heart was thirsting to save men. This thirst had been on him from the earliest of his earthly days. “Wist ye not,” said he, while yet a boy, “that I must be about my Father’s business?” Did he not tell his disciples, “I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished?” He thirsted to pluck us from between the jaws of hell, to pay our redemption price, and set us free from the eternal condemnation which hung over us ; and when on the cross the work was almost done his thirst was not assuaged, and could not be till he could say, “It is finished.” It is almost done, thou Christ of God ; thou hast almost saved thy people ; there remaineth but one thing more, that thou shouldst actually die, and hence thy strong desire to come to the end and complete thy labour. Thou wast still straitened till the last pang was felt and the last word spoken to complete the full redemption, and hence thy cry, “I thirst.”

Beloved, there is now upon our Master, and there always has been, a thirst after the love of his people. Do you not remember how that thirst of his was strong in the old days of the prophet ? Call to mind his complaint in the fifth chapter of Isaiah, “Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill : and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein.” What was he looking for from his vineyard and its winepress ? What but for the juice of the vine that he might be refreshed ? “And he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes,”—vinegar, and not wine ; sourness, and not sweetness. So he was thirsting then.

According to the sacred canticle of love, in the fifth chapter of the *Book of Songs*, we learn that when he drank in those olden times it was in the garden of his church that he was refreshed. What doth he say? "I come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrour with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk; eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundant, O beloved." In the same song he speaks of his church, and says, "The roof of thy mouth is as the best wine for my beloved, that goeth down sweetly, causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak." And again in the eighth chapter the bride saith, "I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranate." Yes, he loves to be with his people; they are the garden where he walks for refreshment and their love, their graces, are the milk and wine of which he delights to drink. Christ was always thirsty to save men, and to be loved of men; and we see a type of his life-long desire when, being weary, he sat thus on the well and said to the woman of Samaria, "Give me drink." There was a deeper meaning in his words than she dreamed of, as a verse further down fully proves, when he said to his disciples, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." He derived spiritual refreshment from the winning of that woman's heart to himself.

And now, brethren, our blessed Lord has at this time a thirst for communion with each one of you who are his people, not because you can do him good, but because he can do you good. He thirsts to bless you; he thirsts to receive your grateful love in return; he thirsts to see you looking with a believing eye to his fulness, and holding out your emptiness that he may supply it. He saith, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." What does he knock he for? It is that he may eat and drink with you, for he promises that if we open to him he will enter in and sup with us and dwell with him. He is thirsty still, you see, for our poor love, and surely he cannot deny it to him. Come let us pour out full flagons, until his thirst is fulfilled in us. And what makes him love us so? Ah, that I cannot tell, except his own great love. He *must* love; it is his nature. He must love his chosen whom he has once begun to love, for he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. His great love makes him thirst for us much nearer than we are; he will never be satisfied till all the redeemed are beyond gunshot of the enemy. I will give you one of his thirsty prayers—"Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." He wants you brother, he wants you, dear sister, he longs to have you wholly to himself. Come to him in prayer, come to him in fellowship, come to him by perfect consecration, come to him by surrendering your whole being to the sweet mysterious influences of his Spirit. Sit at his feet with Mary, lean on his breast with John; yea, come with the spouse in the song and say, "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth, for his love is better than wine." He calls for that, will you not give it to him? Are you so frozen at heart that not a drop of cold water can be melted for Jesus? Are you lukewarm? Brother, if he says, "I thirst" and you bring him a lukewarm heart that is worse than vinegar, for he has said, "I will spue thee out of my mouth." He can receive vinegar, but not lukewarm love. Come, bring him your warm heart, and let him drink from that purified chalice

much as he wills. Let all your love be his. I know he loves to receive from you, because he delights even in a cup of cold water that you give to one of his disciples ; how much more will he delight in the giving of your whole self to him ? Therefore while he thirsts give him to drink this day.

V. Lastly, the cry of "I thirst" is to us THE PATTERN OF OUR DEATH WITH HIM. Know ye not, beloved,—for I speak to those who know the Lord,—that ye are crucified together with Christ ? Well, then, what means this cry, "I thirst," but this, that we should thirst too ? We do not thirst after the old manner wherein we were bitterly afflicted, for he hath said, "He that drinketh of this water shall never thirst:" but now we covet a new thirst, a refined and heavenly appetite, a craving for our Lord. O thou blessed Master, if we are indeed nailed up to the tree with thee, give us to thirst after thee with a thirst which only the cup of "the new covenant in thy blood" can ever satisfy. Certain philosophers have said that they love the pursuit of truth even better than the knowledge of truth. I differ from them greatly, but I will say this, that next to the actual enjoyment of my Lord's presence I love to hunger and to thirst after him. Rutherford used words somewhat to this effect, "I thirst for my Lord and this is joy ; a joy which no man taketh from me. Even if I may not come at him, yet shall I be full of consolation, for it is heaven to thirst after him, and surely he will never deny a poor soul liberty to admire him, and adore him, and thirst after him." As for myself, I would grow more and more insatiable after my divine Lord, and when I have much of him I would still cry for more ; and then for more, and still for more. My heart shall not be content till he is all in all to me, and I am altogether lost in him. O to be enlarged in soul so as to take deeper draughts of his sweet love, for our heart cannot have enough. One would wish to be as the spouse, who, when she had already been feasting in the banqueting-house, and had found his fruit sweet to her taste, so that she was overjoyed, yet cried out, "Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples, for I am sick of love." She craved full flagons of love though she was already overpowered by it. This is a kind of sweet whereof if a man hath much he must have more, and when he hath more he is under a still greater necessity to receive more, and so on, his appetite for ever growing by that which it feeds upon, till he is filled with all the fulness of God. "I thirst,"—ay, this is my soul's word with her Lord. Borrowed from his lips it well suiteth my mouth.

"I thirst, but not as once I did,
The vain delights of earth to share ;
Thy wounds, Emmanuel, all forbid
That I should seek my pleasures there.

"Dear fountain of delight unknown !
No longer sink below the brim ;
But overflow, and pour me down
A living and life-giving stream."

Jesns thirsted, then let us thirst in this dry and thirsty land where no water is. Even as the hart panteth after the water brooks, our souls would thirst after thee, O God.

Beloved, let us thirst for the souls of our fellow-men. I have already told you that such was our Lord's mystical desire; let it be ours also. Brother, thirst to have your children saved. Brother, thirst I pray you to have your workpeople saved. Sister, thirst for the salvation of your class, thirst for the redemption of your family, thirst for the conversion of your husband. We ought all to have a longing for conversions. Is it so with each one of you? If not, bestir yourselves at once. Fix your hearts upon some unsaved one, and thirst until he is saved. It is the way whereby many shall be brought to Christ, when this blessed soul-thirst of true Christian charity shall be upon those who are themselves saved. Remember how Paul said, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." He would have sacrificed himself to save his countrymen, so heartily did he desire their eternal welfare. Let this mind be in you also.

As for yourselves, thirst after perfection. Hunger and thirst after righteousness, for you shall be filled. Hate sin, and heartily loathe it; but thirst to be holy as God is holy, thirst to be like Christ, thirst to bring glory to his sacred name by complete conformity to his will.

May the Holy Ghost work in you the complete pattern of Christ crucified, and to him shall be praise for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Mark xv. 15—37;
Psalm lxix. 1—21.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—84 (Song II.), 69, 295.

"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL." Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.

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Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

BELIEVERS FREE FROM THE DOMINION OF SIN.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 21ST, 1878. BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace."—Romans vi. 14.

OUR constant hearers will remember that a Sabbath or so ago we spoke upon "Submit yourselves unto God."* It is both the way *to* peace and the way *of* peace to submit one's whole self unto God. Nor is it an irksome task to a true believer, but the desire of his heart, the pleasure of his life. He shudders at the idea of yielding his members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but according to the language of the verse which precedes our text, he yields himself unto God as one who has been made alive from the dead, and his members as instruments of righteousness unto God. Complete consecration of every faculty of mind and body unto the Lord is our soul's deepest wish. We can sing most sincerely that sweet consecration hymn—

"Take my hands and let them move,
At the impulse of thy love.
Take my feet and let them be,
Swift and beautiful for thee.

"Take my voice and let me sing,
Always, only for my King:
Take my lips and let them be,
Filled with messages from thee.

"Take my will and make it thine,
It shall be no longer mine.
Take my intellect, and use
Every power as thou shalt choose.

"So that all my powers combine,
To adore thy grace divine,
Heart and soul a living flame,
Glorifying thy great name."

* Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, No. 1,408.

But, beloved, we find another law in our members warring against the law of our mind. To the full yielding up of all our members we find hindrance in the sin which dwelleth in us, that sin which finds its haunts and hiding place in our mortal body, in the desires, passions, and appetites of our animal nature. These within proper limits are right enough; it is right that we eat and drink, and so forth, but our natural instincts are apt to demand indulgence, and so to become lusts. Our mortal body in its natural desires, affords dens for the foxes of sin. The carnal mind also, readily leans to the indulgence of the body, and thus there is presented a powerful opposition to the work of grace. Every true child of God must be conscious of the presence of the rebellious power and principle of sin within him. We strive to keep it under, to subdue and conquer it, and we hope to see it utterly exterminated at the last, for our case is like that of Israel with the Canaanites, and we long for the day when "There shall no more be the Canaanite in the house of thy land."

Sin is a domineering force. A man cannot sin up to a fixed point and then say to sin, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further." It is an imperious power, and where it dwells it is hungry for the mastery. Just as our Lord, when he enters the soul, will never be content with divided dominion, so is it with sin, it labours to bring our entire manhood under subjection. Hence we are compelled to strive daily against this ambitious principle: according to the working of the Spirit of God in us we wrestle against sin that it may not have dominion over us. Sin has unquestioned dominion over multitudes of human hearts, and in some it has set up its horrid throne on high, and keeps its seat with fortifications of arms, so that its empire is undisturbed; in others the throne is disputed, for conscience mutinies, but yet the tyrant is not dethroned. Over the whole world sin exercises a dreadful tyranny. It would hold us all in the same bondage were it not for one who is stronger than sin and who has undertaken to deliver us out of its hand, and will certainly perform the redeeming work. Here is the charter of our liberty, the security of our safety—"Sin shall not have dominion over you." Sin reigns over those who abide in unbelief, but it shall not have dominion over *you*, "because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." The whole world lieth in the wicked one, but "ye are not of the world," and therefore "sin shall not have dominion over you." If we are distressed by the fear that sin will ultimately get the mastery over us, let us be comforted by our text. Holy jealousy leads us to fear this, though we have for many years been enabled to maintain a spotless character before men, we may in some unguarded hour make shipwreck of faith and end our life voyage as castaways upon the rocks of shame. The flesh is frail and our strength is perfect weakness, and therefore we dread lest we should make some terrible fall, and bring dishonour upon the holy name by which we are called: under such feelings we may find for comfort to the rich assurance of the text, "Sin shall not have dominion over you."

Three things will demand our consideration and afford us consolation this morning. The first is, *the peculiar position* of believers,—"*Ye are not under the law, but under grace*;" secondly, the *special assurance* made to them, "*Sin shall not have dominion over you*;" and thirdly,

the remarkable reason given for this statement, "Sin shall not have dominion over you : for ye are not under the law, but under grace."

I. First, then, here is A PECULIAR POSITION,—“Ye are not under the law.” All men are under the law by nature, and consequently they are condemned by it because they have broken its commands; and apart from our Lord Jesus men are only reprieved criminals, respited from day to day, but still under sentence and waiting for the appointed hour when the warrant shall be solemnly executed upon them. But believers are regarded as having died in Christ, and by that death they have escaped from under the law : they are clean delivered from the law by the fact that their Redeemer endured the penalty of the law on their behalf, and at the same time honoured the law by rendering perfect obedience to it : thus in a two-fold manner meeting all the law's requirements, so that it has no more demands upon his people.

“Not under the law,” being interpreted, means that we are not trying to be saved by obedience to law; we do not pretend to earn eternal life by merit, nor hope to claim anything of the Lord as due to us for good works. The principle which rules our life is not mercenary, we do not expect to earn a reward, neither are we flogged to duty by dread of punishment. We are under grace—that is to say, we are treated on the principle of mercy and love, and not on that of justice and desert. Freely, of his own undeserved favour, God has forgiven us for Christ's sake. He has regarded us with favour, not because we deserved it, but simply because he willed to do so, according to that ancient declaration, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” The Lord did not choose us because of any goodness in us, but he hath saved us and called us according to the purpose of his own will. Moreover, our continuance in a state of salvation depends upon the same grace which first placed us there. We do not stand or fall according to our personal merit; but because Jesus lives we live, because Jesus is accepted we are accepted, because Jesus is beloved we are beloved : in a word, our standing is not based upon merit, but upon mercy; not upon our changeable character, but upon the immutable mercy of God. Grace is the tenure upon which we hold our position before the Lord. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves : it is the gift of God;” “but that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident : for, the just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith : but, the man that doeth them shall live in them.”

Let us endeavour to recount the privileges of this position by mentioning the evils from which it releases us. First, *we no longer dread the curse of the law*. Those who are under the law may well be horribly afraid because of the penalties which are due through their many failures and transgressions. They have broken the law, and are therefore in constant danger of judgment and condemnation. The careless try to shake off the thought as much as possible by putting off the evil day, by forgetting death, and by pretending to disbelieve in judgment and eternal wrath; but still more or less this thought disturbs them, a dreadful sound is in their ears. When men are once awakened the dread of punishment for sin haunts them day and night, and fills them with terror; and well it may, for they are under the law, and the law will soon cast

them into its prison, from which they will never escape. Every transgression and disobedience must receive a just recompense of reward. Now, believers have no fear as to the punishment of their sin, for our sin was by the Lord himself laid upon Jesus, and the penalty was borne by him: "the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: as it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Substitution clears the Christian from all debt to justice, and he dares to challenge the law itself with the question—Who is he that condemneth, since Christ has died? Yea, he goes further, and challenges an accusation—Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect, since God hath justified? No penalty do we dread, for we are forgiven, and God will not pardon and then punish. "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." Will God punish those from whom he has removed transgression, or cast those into hell whose sins he has cast behind his back? Impossible. Hence, when we see the stern array of the judgment seat, and hear the threatenings of vengeance, we who are believers rejoice to feel that these terrors have nothing to do with us. The Great Surety has secured his people from all risk of wrath. The undying worm is not for them, the unquenchable fire is not for them, neither shall the pit shut her mouth upon them, for they are not under the law.

Then the believer *no longer drudges in unwilling obedience, seeking to reach a certain point of merit*. The man under the law who is awakened and aroused very frequently tries to keep the commands in order to attain, at any rate, to a fair measure of goodness. For this he labours very hard, as men who tug at the oar to escape from a tempest. If he could but reach a certain degree of virtue he would feel safe; if he were equal to such an one he would be at rest. Alas, he has no power to attain even to his own ideal; he finds his resolutions written in water, and his goodness vanishes like the morning mist. His servile works are ill done, and fail to yield him peace of mind. Now, the believer is under no such drudgery; Christ has fulfilled the law for him, and he rests in that finished work. He does not aim at high attainments in order to win the favour of God; he has that favour; it has come to him freely and undeservedly, and he rejoices in it. A high ambition moves him, but it is not that of saving himself by his own works. He obeys out of love; he delights in the law after the inner man, and confesses with Paul, "the law is holy, and just, and good"; he wishes that he could live without sin, but he never dreams that even then he could make an atonement for the past, nor does he fancy that by his own merit he is to obtain salvation for the future. The work through which he is saved is complete; it is not his own work, but the work of Jesus, and hence, when he sees his own shortcomings and iniquities, he does not, therefore, doubt his salvation, but continues to rest in Jesus. He is no longer a slave, flogged with the whip of fear, and made to labour for his very life, and gather nothing for his pains; but he is free from the principle of law, and works from a principle of love; not to secure divine favour, but because that favour has been freely manifested towards him.

The Christian man is now *no longer uncertain as to the continuance of divine love*. Under the law, no man's standing can be secure, since by a single sin he may forfeit his position. If a legalist should be able to persuade himself that he has reached a sufficient point of merit and is safe, yet he cannot be sure of continuing in his exalted position, for like the flower of the grass all human comeliness withers away. However meritorious a man may conceive himself to be, yet he may fall short of the standard even now; and if not, in the future he may spoil it all. The learned Bellarmine, one of the great antagonists of Martin Luther, once gave utterance to language which I cannot verbally remember, but which was to the following effect; of course, being a Papist, he believed in justification by works, but yet he observes that, "nevertheless, seeing that even in the best of men good works are usually marred by sin, and seeing that no man can know when he has performed quite enough good works to save him, it is upon the whole safest to trust only in the merits of Jesus Christ." We agree with the cardinal and accept the safest way as good enough for us. Safest, indeed, it is to us, for it is the only way which we can tread, since all the good works we have ever done are defiled and polluted either in motive beforehand, or in the spirit in which they were done, or by proud reflections afterwards; so that we dare not trust even in our prayers and devotions and almsgivings, or repentances, but must rest upon the merit of Christ alone. The merit of Christ is always a constant and abiding quantity; if, therefore, we rest thereon, our foundation is as secure at one time as at another. The merits of Jesus will be throughout eternity sweet before God on our behalf. Is he not "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever"? Hence the confidence of the believer rests upon a foundation which will no more be shaken in the future than it is to-day. Glory be to God, he doth not cast away his people whom he did foreknow; he doth not love to-day and hate to-morrow; nor favour with his grace the child whom he has adopted and afterwards disown him. "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." We are clear from the bondage of the law, since we are no longer under the covenant of works, but have come under the covenant of grace, which is founded upon promises which nothing can disannul.

In consequence of this the believer is *no longer afraid of the last great day*. Shall all our sins be read and published before an assembled universe? "Ifso," saith the man who is under the law, "it will go hard with me." Judgment is a terrible word to those who are hoping to save themselves, for if their doings are to be put into the balances they will surely be found wanting. But judgment has no terror in it to a believer: he can sing with our poet—

"Bold shall I stand in that great day,
For who ought to my charge shall lay?
While through thy blood absolved I am
From sin's tremendous curse and shame."

Will the sins of believers be published at the last day? If it be to the glory of forgiving love, let them be. Who among us need be afraid since at the end of the whole list there shall be written, "and all these

were blotted out for Jesus Christ's sake." And if not published at all because all our sins were cast behind Jehovah's back, and if instead thereof the Judge shall only proclaim the good works of his people and say, "I was hungry and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me drink; and inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me," then we may well welcome the last assize and cry "Welcome, welcome, Son of God." If the book of record shall be opened which might justly condemn us, yet it is written, "And another book was opened, which was the book of life." If our names be there we have nought to fear.

One word may be added here, namely, that the believer being no longer under the law has *no slavish dread of God*. As long as I am at enmity with God, guilty of breaking his law, and liable to his righteous wrath, I dread his name and shrink from his presence. The soul under the law stands as the Israelites did, far off from the mountain, with a bound set between themselves and the glory of God. Distance and separation are the natural condition of all who are under the law. Far hence, cries the heart of man, when it beholds God touching the hills so that they smoke; and when it hears the voice of God like a trumpet waxing exceeding loud and long it beseeches that it may not hear such words any more. Not so the believer, for his heart and his flesh cry out for the Lord, and he pants to come and appear before God. We have access with boldness to the throne of the heavenly grace, and we delight to avail ourselves of it. Through the Mediator we have fellowship with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ. The Holy Ghost has made us long to be brought nearer and nearer to our divine Father. Our God is a consuming fire, but that consuming fire has no terror for us, since it will only melt the alloy from the gold and remove the dross from the silver. The law could only say to us, "Depart, ye cursed," but grace saith, "Come, ye blessed." The law said, "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet"; but grace cries with a voice of pity, "Whosoever is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him come." We have accepted the call of grace, and now we know the Lord and love him. Perfect love has cast out fear, for fear hath torment. We are not under the law, but we have "known and believed the love that God hath to us."

Now I speak to you Christian people, even to you who believe in Christ, and I beg you to understand this freedom from the law, and then to hold it fast, for there are some of you who return in a measure to the legal yoke, whereas the apostle says, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Do you feel helpless, cold, and heavy, and do you therefore conclude that you are not saved? Are you not coming under the law, and measuring the power of the grace of God by your own deservings or excellencies? If you judge your standing before God by anything except your faith in his promise, you will bring yourself into bondage. You can walk by faith, but you will stumble if you try any other way. There is but one deliverance for me when I question my own state, and that is to fly to simple faith in Jesus. When Satan says, "You are no saint," do not argue with him, for he is too subtle for a poor soul like you. Yield the

point and say, "It may be I am no saint, nor are you either." "No," saith he, "you are deceived, you are a hypocrite." Reply to him, "If I am not a saint, I am a sinner; and being a sinner, I find it written that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. I put myself in that list, O Satan, and even thou canst not deny that I am such. I believe in Jesus, and believing in him I am justified before God by the righteousness of my Lord, and I have peace with God through Jesus Christ." Beloved, this is safe standing. If we are indeed saved by the righteousness of another, why do we question the power of that righteousness to save us because of our own conscious feebleness? for we are not saved by our own strength or feebleness, but by the power of the Lord Jesus. If we are standing with one foot on the rock of Christ's finished work and the other upon the sand of our own doings, then we may well stand or totter according to which foot we are trusting to; but if we set both feet upon the rock then we may stand fast though the sea roar and the floods sweep the sand away. Mind you do not try the double foundation, for it will never answer. Partly Christ and partly self will soon come to a failure. No, our great Redeemer cried, "It is finished," and it is finished, and those who rest on him have a finished salvation, for they are not under the law, but under grace.

II. Now, secondly, we come to THE SPECIAL ASSURANCE of the text: "Sin shall not have dominion over you." *This is a very needful assurance, especially at times.* Sin is a great working power, and all around us we see its hideous operations: it is an evil as incessant in its activity as it is deadly in its results. As we look at its forcible workings, we cry in alarm, "It will surely drag me down one of these days," but the dread fear is removed by the cheering voice of the Holy Ghost, who assures us, "Sin shall not have dominion over you."

Alas, we not only see the evil working in others, but it assails ourselves: our eyes are drawn aside to look on vanity, our ears hearken to evil speaking, and our heart itself at times grows cold or wanders. Then we are apt to be cast down and to doubt. Here the sweet assurance cheers us—though you be tempted you shall not be led astray, for "sin shall not have dominion over you." "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Stand in the strength of faith and in the power of the precious blood, and though you are beset with evil suggestions a thousand times a day, and every sense is assailed by the witcheries of evil, yet "sin shall not have dominion over you." Cheered by such a word as this we remain on our watch-tower, and are not overcome of evil.

Sometimes sin forces its way into our souls and rouses our inward evil to an awful degree, so that the imagination sets fire to our lusts, and the smoke of the conflagration blows in the eyes of the affections, and almost chokes the understanding. Yes, sin may invade your soul, and for awhile find a lodgment there, so as to be your plague and torment; it may even crush you down, rob you of your comfort, injure your graces, and create intestine war to the detriment of your peace, but it shall not have dominion over you. Those of you who are acquainted with John Bunyan's "Holy War" will remember how wonderfully the glorious dreamer describes Diabolus besieging the town of Mansoul after it had been occupied by the Prince Immanuel. After many battles and cunning plots the enemy entered into the city, filled all the streets with the yells

of his followers, and polluted the whole place with the presence of his hosts; but yet he could not take the castle in the centre of the town, which held out for Immanuel. That castle was the heart, and he could by no means secure a footing in it. He beat his big hell drum almost day and night around the walls, so that those who had fled to the castle had a very terrible time of it, and he set all his huge machinery to work to batter down the walls, but he could not enter. No, sin may for awhile seem to prevail in the believer till he has no rest, and is sore beset, hearing nothing but the devil's tattoo sounding in his ears—"Sin, sin, sin;" but nevertheless sin shall not have dominion over him. Sin may haunt your bed and board, and follow you down the streets in your walks, and enter the very room into which you withdraw to pray; but your inmost self shall still cry out against it, for "sin shall not have dominion over you." Sin may vex you and thrust itself upon you, but it cannot become your lord. The devil hath great wrath, and rages horribly for awhile, knowing that his time is short; but he shall be subdued and expelled, for the Lord our God giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ.

Sometimes, alas, sin not only enters us, but prevails over us, and we are forced in deep anguish to confess that we have fallen beneath its power. It is terrible that it should be so, even for a moment, and yet it would be idle to deny the mournful fact. Who among us can say, "I am clean, I have not sinned"? Still, a temporary defeat is not sufficient to effect a total subjugation. Sin shall not have dominion over the believer, for though he fall he shall arise again. The child of God when he falls into the mire is like the sheep which gets up and escapes from the ditch as quickly as possible; it is not his nature to lie there. The ungodly man is like the hog which rolls in the filth and wallows in it with delight. The mire has dominion over the swine, but it has none over the sheep. With many bleatings and outcries the sheep seeks the shepherd again, but not so the swine. Every child of God weeps, mourns, and bemoans his sin, and he hates it even when for awhile he has been overtaken by it, and this is proof that sin hath not dominion over him. It has an awful power, but it has not dominion: it casts us down, but it cannot make us take delight in its evil.

There are times when the believer feels greatly his danger: his feet have almost gone, his steps have well nigh slipped: then how sweetly doth this assurance come to the soul, "Sin shall not have dominion over you." The Lord is able to keep you from falling, and you shall be preserved even to the end.

This assurance secures us from a very great danger: from the danger of being under the absolute sway of sin. What is meant by sin having dominion? Look and see; there are men who live in sin, and yet they do not appear to know it; sin has dominion over them by spreading a veil over their hearts, so that their conscience is deadened. They are so enslaved as to be content in bondage. You shall not be so; you shall be enlightened and instructed, so that when you sin you shall be well aware of it. Self-excuse shall be impossible to you. Many men live in gross sin, and are not ashamed, they are at ease in it, and all is quiet; but it shall not be so with you, in whom the life of God has been implanted. If you do wrong you shall smart for it, and your nest shall be stuffed with thorns. God has so changed your nature by his grace that when you sin you shall be

like a fish on dry land, you shall be out of your element, and long to get into a right state again. You cannot sin, for you love God. The sinner may drink sin down as the ox drinketh down water, but to you it shall be as the brine of the sea. You may become so foolish as to try the pleasures of the world, but they shall be no pleasures to you; you shall cry out with Solomon, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." That marvellous man tried the world at its best, and was disappointed, and you may be quite sure that where he failed you will not succeed. If the Lord loves you sin will never yield you satisfaction. In worldly company you shall be all the while like a man who sits upon thorns, or walks amid vipers and cobras; and in worldly amusement you shall feel as if the house would fall upon you. An ungodly man under the dominion of sin loves sin, but that you shall never do. He wishes he could sin more, for he has upon him the thirst of intoxication; but as for you, you shall never be made happy by evil, but shall groan under it if you ever yield to its power. You shall hate yourself to think you ever consented to its solicitations; you shall be wretched and unhappy and shall find no rest till you return unto your Lord. Your nature has been so changed that you cannot henceforth give a moment's entertainment to sin without feeling like one who carries burning coals in his bosom, or thrusts thorns into his flesh. No, beloved, if you be indeed a believer in Christ you must fight with sin till you die, and, what is more, you must conquer it in the name of the Lord. You are sometimes afraid that it will vanquish you, but if you be of the true seed it cannot prevail. Like Samson, you shall break all its bands. You shall rise superior to habits which now enthrall you; you shall even forget those strong impulses which now sweep you before them; your inward graces shall gather force, while the Holy Ghost shall help your infirmities and you shall be changed from glory to glory as by the presence of the Lord.

This assurance is confirmed by the context—"Sin shall not have dominion over you," because you are dead to it by virtue of your union to Christ. You died with Christ and you have been buried with Christ, how then shall sin have dominion over you? Besides, you live in Christ in newness of life by reason of his living in you. How can the new nature live in sin? How can that which is born of God live like that which is born of the devil? No, no, it cannot be, Christ has undertaken to save you from your sins, and he will do it: he will keep you watchful, prayerful, vigilant; he will instruct you in his word, he will help you by his Spirit, he will perfect you in himself. You are bound for victory and you shall have it; thanks be unto God who gives it to you through Jesus Christ our Lord. "Sin shall not have dominion over you."

III. Now I come to my last head, which is, THE REMARKABLE REASON that is given for sin's never having dominion: "For ye are not under the law, but under grace." "There, there," says many an unconverted man, "did you ever hear such doctrine as he has been preaching to us this morning? Not under the law! Well, then, we may sin as we like." That is your logic, that is the way in which a base heart sours the sweet milk of the word; but it is not the argument of a child of God. Mark how Paul puts it: "What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid." He flings away the inference with horror and detestation, crying, "God forbid!" Let me just show

you why being under the law is not helpful to holiness, while being under grace is the great means of it.

Those who are under the law will always be under the dominion of sin, and it cannot be otherwise. First, because the law puts a man under the dominion of sin by pronouncing sentence of condemnation upon him as soon as he has transgressed. What does the law say to him? "Henceforth you are guilty, and I condemn you. He that offendeth in one point is guilty of all. Thus the law shuts a man up to being a sinner, and offers him no space for repentance. It accuses, condemns, and sentences, but affords no hope and offers no encouragement. It is not so with those who are under grace; to them grace saith, "You are sinners, but you are freely forgiven; your iniquity is pardoned; your transgression is put away; go, and sin no more." Thus relieved, the penitent lifts up his head, and cries, "Enable me to praise thee, and grant that I may be upheld by grace in the way of uprightness." The amazing love of God when shed abroad in the heart creates a desire for better things, and what the law could not do, grace accomplishes.

A man under the law is by the law driven to despair. "What," saith he, "am I to keep this law in order to be saved? Alas! I have already broken it, and if I had not, it is too high and holy for me to rise to its full height." Therefore he resolves that he will not attempt the task, and he sinks into indifference; or, in some cases, he bethinks him of the old proverb, that you may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, and he resolves that he will take his fill of sin. Because there is no hope, he will plunge into iniquity. He vows that if hell must be his portion for ever, at any rate, he will enjoy the sweetness there is in sin while he may. So the law, because of the evil heart it has to deal with, excites such a condition of heart that sin is confirmed in its dominion. Being threatened, the rebellious heart hardens itself, and defies the Lord; and then concluding that peace is impossible, it continues more and more to fight against the Lord. Not so the child of God, he saith, "God, for Christ's sake, hath cast my sins behind his back, and I am saved. Now, for the love I bear his name, I will serve him with all my might, because of all that he has done for me." Thus the grace of our Lord Jesus, by its freeness and richness, breaks the dominion of sin which the law only served to establish and confirm. Not that the law is evil, God forbid! but because we are evil and rebel against the holy law.

A man under the law does not escape from the dominion of sin because *the law rouses the opposition of the human heart*. There are a great many things which people never wish to do, nor think of doing till they are forbidden. Lock up a closet in your house and say to your wife and children, "You must never enter that closet, nor even look into the key-hole." Perhaps they have never wanted to look into the dingy old corner before, but now they pine to inspect it. A number of bye-laws have lately been posted up as to the use of Clapham-common, and I am half afraid to read them, for fear I should want to break them. I dare say that many things which I never desired to do are now strictly prohibited, and I shall feel vexed with the commissioners for lessening my liberty. I should not wonder but what numbers of persons, who never visited the common before, will now become sinners against the new laws. Law, by reason of

our unruly nature, excites opposition, and creates sin, for what a man may not do he immediately wants to do. He who is under the law will never escape from the dominion of sin, for sin comes by the law by reason of the iniquity of our hearts. But when we are not under the law, but under grace, we love God for his love to us, and labour to please him in all things.

The law moreover affords a man no actual help. All it does is to say, "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not"; it can do no more: but grace gives us what the law requires of us. The law says, "make you a new heart": grace replies, "A new heart also will I give you, and a right spirit will I put within you." The law says, "Keep my commandments"; and grace answers, "Thou shalt keep my commandments and do them." Grace brings the Holy Spirit into the soul to work in us holy affections and a hatred of sin, and hence what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, grace accomplishes for us by its own almighty power.

Further, the law inspires no sentiment of love, and love after all is the fulfilling of the law. If you are told you shall and you shall not, there is nothing in this to inspire love to the lawgiver; law is hard and cold, like the two tables of Moses. Law does not change the heart or remove enmity: it tends rather the other way. Law never excites enthusiasm for that which is right, it is too stern and chill to touch the heart. Mere law does not even raise in a man's heart a high ideal of what he ought to be. Look at the legalist, the man who hopes for salvation by the law, he looks upon religion as a task in which he has no delight; he is a bondsman, and nothing more. He does as much or as little as he is forced to do, but his heart is not in it. The men who think they have kept the law of God are evidently very far from understanding its meaning: they have a very poor idea of the mind of God or they would not have thought that they had fulfilled the will of God with such a poor, miserable, hypocritical righteousness as theirs. The Pharisee thought he had kept the law, for he fasted twice a week, and paid tithes of all he possessed, and yet the same man could go and swallow a widow's house behind the door and do all sorts of abominable actions. It is clear that he had formed a shockingly low notion of true holiness; in fact, he had degraded the law into a mere external ordinance, which took note of the outside of the cup and platter and left the inside full of filthiness. But see what grace does: it fires a man with enthusiasm and sets before him a lofty idea of excellence. It causes him to love the Lord, and then it gives him a high idea of purity and holiness. Though he rises many grades beyond the Pharisee, yet the believer cries, "I am not what I should be;" and if he becomes the most zealous, consecrated man that ever lived, the law is still beyond him, and he still asks that he may be able to rise to greater heights of holiness and virtue. This grace does, but this the law can never do.

The most pleasing service in the world is that which is done from motives of affection, and not for wages. The servant who only does his work for his pay is not valued like the old attached domestic who nursed you when you were a boy, and waited on your father before you. No money can purchase such service as he renders, it is so thoroughly hearty and prompt. If you could not afford to pay his wages he would stop with you; and if anything goes awry he puts up with it, because he

loves you. You prize such a man above rubies. So is it with the child of God. The mere legalist does what he ought, or at least thinks he does so; but as for heartiness and zeal, he knows nothing of such things. The child of God, with all his feebleness and his blundering, is far more accepted, for he does all he can out of pure love, and then cries, "I am an unprofitable servant, I have done no more than was my duty to have done; the Lord help me to do more." God accepts heart service, but heart service the law never did produce, and never will. The only true heart service in the world comes from those who are not under the law, but under grace; hence sin shall not have dominion over those who are not under the law. The spirit of the world is legal, and its wise men tell us that we must preach to people that they must be virtuous or they will go to hell, and we must hold out heaven as the reward of morality. They believe in the principle of chain and whip. But what comes of such doctrine? The more you preach it, the less virtue, the less obedience there is in the world. But when you preach love the effect is very different—"Come," saith God, "I forgive you freely. Trust my Son, and I will save you outright, though in you there is nothing to merit my esteem. Accept my free favour, and I will receive you graciously, and love you freely." This looks at first sight as if it gave a licence to sin, but how does it turn out? Why, this wondrous grace taking possession of the human heart breeds love in return, which love becomes the fountain of purity and holiness, and such as receive it endeavour to perfect holiness in the fear of God. Beloved, do not get under the law, do not yield to legal threats or legal hopes, but live under the free grace gospel. Let the note that peals on your ear be no longer the thunder of Sinai. "Do and live," but let it be the sweet song of free grace and dying love. Ah, ring those charming bells from morn till eve. Let us hear their liquid music again and again. Live and do; not do and live: not work for salvation, but being saved, work; being already delivered, go forth and prove by your grateful affections and zealous actions what the grace of God has done for you. "Whosoever believeth in Jesus Christ hath everlasting life." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Romans v. vi.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—911, 617, 616.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

UNDER CONSTRAINT.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 28TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead."—2 Corinthians v. 14.

THE apostle and his brethren were unselfish in all that they did. He could say of himself and of his brethren that when they varied their modes of action they had ever the same object in view; they lived only to promote the cause of Christ, and to bless the souls of men. He says, "Whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause." Some may have said that Paul was too excitable, and expressed himself too strongly. "Well," said he, "if it be so, it is to God." Others may have noticed the reasoning faculty to be exceedingly strong in Paul, and may perhaps have thought him to be too coolly argumentative. "But," said Paul, "if we be sober, it is for your cause."

Viewed from some points the apostle and his co-labourers must have appeared to be raving fanatics, engaged upon a Quixotic enterprise, and almost if not quite out of their minds. One who had heard the apostle tell the story of his conversion exclaimed, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad;" and no doubt many who saw the singular change in his conduct, and knew what he had given up and what he endured for his new faith, had come to the same conclusion. Paul would not be at all offended by this judgment, for he would remember that his Lord and Master had been charged with madness, and that even our Lord's relatives had said, "He is beside himself." To Festus he had replied, "I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness"; and to Corinthian objectors he gave a still fuller reply. Blessed are they who are charged with being out of their mind through zeal for the cause of Jesus, they have a more than sufficient answer when they can say, "If we be beside ourselves, it is to God." It is no unusual thing for madmen to think others mad, and no strange thing for a mad world to accuse the only morally sane among men of being fools and lunatics: but wisdom is justified of her

children. If others assailed the apostle with another charge, and insinuated that there was a method in his madness, that his being all things to all men showed an excess of prudence, and was no doubt a means to an end, which end it is possible they hinted at was a desire for power, he could reply most conclusively, "If we be sober, it is for your cause." Paul had acted so unselfishly that he could appeal to the Corinthian church and ask them to bear him witness that he sought not theirs but theirs, and that if he had judged their disorders with great sobriety it was for their cause. Whatever he did, or felt, or suffered, or spake, he had but one design in it, and that was the glory of God in the perfecting of believers and the salvation of sinners.

Every Christian minister ought to be able to use the apostle's words without the slightest reserve; yea, and every Christian man should also be able to say the same: "If I be excited, it is in defence of the truth; if I be sober, it is for the maintenance of holiness: if I seem extravagant, it is because the name of Jesus stirs my inmost soul; and if I am moderate in spirit and thoughtful in mood, it is that I may in the wisest manner subserve the interests of my Redeemer's kingdom." God grant that weeping or singing, anxious or hopeful, victorious or defeated, increasing or decreasing, elevated or depressed, we may still follow our one design, and devote ourselves to the holy cause. May we live to see churches made up of people who are all set on one thing, and may those churches have ministers who are fit to lead such a people, because they also are mastered by the same sacred purpose. May the fire which fell of old on Carmel fall on our altar, whereon lieth the sacrifice, wetted a second and a third time from the salt sea of the world, until it shall consume the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and lick up the water that is in the trench. Then will all the people see it, and fall upon their faces, and cry, "The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God."

The apostle now goes on to tell us why it was that the whole conduct of himself and his co-labourers tended to one end and object. He says, "The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then the all died." I give you here as exact a translation as I can.

Two things I shall note in the text: first, *under constraint*; secondly, *under constraint which his understanding justified*.

I. Our main point will come under the head "UNDER CONSTRAINT." Here is the apostle, a man who was born free, a man who beyond all others enjoyed the greatest spiritual liberty, glorying that he is under constraint. He was under constraint because a *great force held him under its power*. "The love of Christ constraineth us." I suppose "constraineth us" is about the best rendering of the passage that could be given; but it might be translated "restraineth." The love of Christ restrains true believers from self-seeking, and forbids them to pursue any object but the highest. Whether they were beside themselves or sober, the early saints yielded to divine restraint, even as a good ship answers to her helm or as a horse obeys the rein. They were not without a restraining force to prevent the slightest subjection to impure motives. The love of Christ controlled them, and held them under its power. But the word "restrained" only expresses a part of the sense, for it means that he was "coerced or pressed," and so impelled forward as one carried along by

pressure. All around him the love of Christ pressed upon him as the water in a river presses upon a swimmer and bears him onward with its stream. Bengel, who is a great authority, reads it, "Keeps us employed": for we are led to diligence, urged to zeal, maintained in perseverance, and carried forward and onward by the love of Jesus Christ. The apostles laboured much, but all their labour sprang from the impulse of the love of Jesus Christ. Just as Jacob toiled for Rachel solely out of love to her, so do true saints serve the Lord Jesus under the omnipotent constraint of love. One eminent expositor reads the word, "containeth us," as though it signified that the Lord's servants were kept together and held as a band under a banner or standard; and he very appropriately refers to the words of the church in the Song, "His banner over me was love." As soldiers are held together by rallying to the standard, so are the saints kept to the work and service of their Lord by the love of Christ, which constrains them to endure all things for the elect's sake, and for the glory of God, and like an ensign is uplifted high as the centre and loadstone of all their energies. In our Lord's love we have the best motive for loyalty, the best reason for energy, and the best argument for perseverance.

The word may also signify "compressed," and then it would mean that all their energies were pressed into one channel, and made to move by the love of Christ. Can I put restraint and constraint, and all the rest, into one by grouping them in a figure? I think I can. When a flood is spread over an expanse of meadow land, and stands in shallow pools, men restrain it by damming it up, and they constrain it to keep to one channel by banking it in. Thus compressed it becomes a stream, and moves with force in one direction. See how it quickens its pace, see what strength it gathers; it turns yonder wheel of the mill, makes a sheep wash, leaps as a waterfall, runs laughing through a village as a brook wherein the cattle stand in the summer's sun. Growing all the while it develops into a river, bearing boats and little ships; and this done, it still increases, and stays not till it flows with mighty flood into the great sea. The love of Christ had pressed Paul's energies into one force, turned them into one channel, and then driven them forward with a wonderful force, till he and his fellows had become a mighty power for good, ever active and energetic. "The love of Christ," saith he, "constraineth us."

All great lives have been under the constraint of some mastering principle. A man who is everything by turns and nothing long is a nobody: a man who wastes life on whims and fancies, pleasures and pleasures, never achieves anything: he flits over the surface of life and leaves no more trace upon his age than a bird upon the sky; but a man, even for mischief, becomes great when he becomes concentrated. What made the young prince of Macedon Alexander the Great but the absorption of his whole mind in the desire for conquest. The man was never happy when he was at ease and in peace. His best days were spent on the battle field or on the march. Let him rush to the forefront of the battle and make the commonest soldier grow into a hero by observing the desperate valour of his king, and then you see the greatness of the man. He could never have been the conqueror of the world if the insatiable greed of conquest had not constrained him. Hence come your Cæsars and your Napoleons—they are whole men in their ambition, subject to the lust of dominion.

When you carry this thought into a better and holier sphere the same fact is clear. Howard could never have been the great philanthropist if he had not been strangely under the witchery of love to prisoners. He was more happy in an hospital or in a prison than he would have been at Court or on the sofa of the drawing room. The man could not help visiting the gaols, he was a captive to his sympathy for men in bondage, and so he spent his life in seeking their good. Look at such a man as Whitfield or his compeer Wesley. Those men had but one thought, and that was to win souls for Christ; their whole being ran into the one river-bed of zeal for God, and made them full and strong as the rushing Rhone. It was their rest to labour for Christ: it was their honour to be pelted while preaching and to be calumniated for the name of Jesus; a bishopric and a seat in the House of Lords would have been the death of them; even a throne would have been a rack if they must have ceased hunting for souls. The men were under the dominion of a passion which they could not withstand, and did not wish to weaken. They could sing—

“The love of Christ doth me constrain
To seek the wandering souls of men;
With cries, entreaties, tears, to save,
To snatch them from the fiery wave.”

Their whole life, being, thought, faculty, spirit, soul, and body became one and indivisible in purpose, and their sanctified manhood was driven forward irresistibly, so that they might be likened to thunderbolts flung from the eternal hand, which must go forward till their end is reached. They could no more cease to preach than the sun could cease shining or reverse his course in the heavens.

Now, this kind of constraint implies no compulsion, and involves no bondage. It is the highest order of freedom; for when a man does exactly what he likes to do, if he wants to express the enthusiastic joy and delight with which he follows his pursuit, he generally uses language similar to that of my text. “Why,” saith he, “I am engrossed by my favourite study; it quite enthrals me; I cannot resist its charms, it holds me beneath its spell.” Is the man any the less free? If a man gives himself up to a science, or to some other object of pursuit, though he is perfectly free to leave it whenever he likes, he will commonly declare that he cannot leave it; it has such a hold upon him that he must addict himself to it. You must not think, therefore, that when we speak of being under constraint from the love of Christ we mean by it that we have ceased to exercise our wills, or to be voluntary agents in our service. Far from it, we own that we are never so free as when we are under bonds to Christ. No, our God does not constrain us by physical force; his cords are those of love, and his bands are those of a man. The constraint is that which we are glad to feel; we give a full assent to its pressure, and therein lies its power. We rejoice to admit that “The love of Christ constraineth us,” we only wish the constraint would increase every day.

We have seen that Paul had a great force holding him: we advance a step further and note that *the constraining force was the love of Christ*. He does not speak of *his* love to Christ: that was a great power too, though secondary to the first; but he is content to mention the greater,

for it includes the less: "The love of Christ constraineth us," that is, Christ's love to us is the master force. And O, brethren, this is a power to which it is joy to submit: this is a force worthy to command the greatest minds. "The love of Christ." Who shall measure this omnipotent force? That love, according to our text, is strongest when seen in his dying for men. Mark the context "because we thus judge, that if one died for all." The peculiar display of the love of Christ which had supreme sway over Paul was the love revealed in his substitutionary death. Think of it a moment. Christ the ever blessed, to whom no pain, nor suffering, nor shame could come, loved men. O singularity of love! He loves guilty men, yea, loves his enemies! Loving poor fallen men, he took their nature and became a man. Marvellous condescension! The Son of God is also Son of Mary, and being found in fashion as a man he humbles himself, and is made of no reputation. See him taken before human judges and unjustly condemned; seized by Roman lictors and lashed with the scourge! Gazing a little longer, you see him nailed to a gibbet, hung up for a felon, left amid jeer and jibe and cruel glance and malicious speech to bleed away his life, till he is actually dead, and laid in the grave. At the back of all this there is the mystery that he was not only dying, but dying in the stead of others, bearing almighty wrath, enduring that dread sentence of death which is attached to human sin. Herein is love indeed, that the infinitely pure should suffer for the sinful, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. Love did never climb to so sublime a height as when it brought Jesus to the bloody tree to bear the dread sentence of inexorable law. Think of this love, beloved, till you feel its constraining influence. It was love eternal, for long before the earth was fashioned the eternal Word had set his eye upon his people, and their names were graven on his heart. It was love unselfish, for he had nothing to gain from his redeemed; there were harps enough in heaven and songs enough in the celestial city without their music. It was love most free and spontaneous, for no man sought it, or so much as dreamed thereof. It was love most persevering, for when man was born into the world and sinned, and rejected Christ, and he came to his own and his own received him not, he loved them still, loved them even to the end. It was love,—what shall I say of it? If I were to multiply words I might rather sink your thoughts than raise them: it was love infinite, immeasurable, inconceivable! It passeth the love of women, though the love of mothers is strong as death, and jealousy is cruel as the grave. It passes the love of martyrs, though that love has triumphed over the fury of the flame. All other lights of love pale their ineffectual brightness before this blazing sun of love, whose warmth a man may feel but upon whose utmost light no eye can gaze. He loved us like a God. It was nothing less than God's own love which burned within that breast, which was bared to the spear that it might redeem us from going down into the pit. It is this force, then, which has taken possession of the Christian's mind, and as Paul says, "constraineth us."

Now we may advance another step and say that *the love of Christ operates upon us by begetting in us love to him*. Brethren beloved, I know you love our Lord Jesus Christ, for all his people love him. "We love him because he first loved us." But what shall I say? There are scarcely any themes upon which I feel less able to speak than these two—

the love of Christ to us and our love to him, because somehow love wanteth a tongue elsewhere than this which dwells in the mouth. This tongue is in the head, and it can therefore tell out our thoughts; but we need a tongue in the heart to tell out our emotions, which have now to borrow utterance from the brain's defective orator. There is a long space between the cool brain and the blazing heart, and matters cool on the road to the tongue, so that the burning heart grows weary of chill words. But oh, we love Jesus; brothers and sisters, we truly love him. His name is sweet as the honeycomb, and his word is precious as the gold of Ophir. His person is very dear to us: from his head to his foot he is altogether lovely. When we get near him and see him at the last, methinks we shall swoon away with excess of joy at the sight of him, and I for one ask no heaven beyond a sight of him and a sense of his love. I do not doubt that we shall enjoy all the harmonies, and all the honours, and all the fellowships of heaven, but if they were all blotted out I do not know that they would make any considerable difference to us, if we may but see our Lord upon his throne, and have his own prayer fulfilled, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." He is happiness to us, yea, he is all in all. Do you not feel that the sweetest sermons you ever hear are those which are fullest of him? When I can sometimes hear a sermon it sickens me to listen to fine attempts to philosophise away the gospel, or to pretty essays which are best described as a jingle of elegant words: but I can hear with rapture the most illiterate and blundering brother if his heart burns within him, and he heartily speaks of my Lord, the Well-beloved of my soul. We are glad to be in the place of assembly when Jesus is within; for whether on Tabor with two or three, or in the congregation of the faithful, when Jesus is present it is good to be there. This joyful feeling when you hear about Jesus shows that you love his person; and your endeavours to spread the gospel show that you love his cause. The love of Christ to you has moved you to desire the coming of his kingdom, and you feel that you could give your life to extend the borders of his dominions, for he is a glorious King, and all the world should know it. Oh that we could see all the nations bowing before his sceptre of peace. We love him so much that till the whole earth smiles in the light of his throne we can never rest.

As to his truth, a very great part of our love to Christ will show itself by attachment to the pure gospel. I have not much patience with a certain class of Christians nowadays who will hear anybody preach so long as they can say, "He is very clever, a fine preacher, a man of genius, a born orator." Is cleverness to make false doctrine palatable? Why, sirs, to me the ability of a man who preaches error is my sorrow rather than my admiration. I cannot endure false doctrine, however neatly it may be put before me. Would you have me eat poisoned meat because the dish is of the choicest ware? It makes me indignant when I hear another gospel put before the people with enticing words, by men who would fain make merchandise of souls; and I marvel at those who have soft words for such deceivers. "That is your bigotry," says one. Call it so if you like, but it is the bigotry of the loving John who wrote—"If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that

biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." I would to God we had all more of such decision, for the lack of it is depriving our religious life of its backbone and substituting for honest manliness a mass of the tremulous jelly of mutual flattery. He who does not hate the false does not love the true; and he to whom it is all the same whether it be God's word or man's, is himself unrenewed at heart. Oh, if some of you were like your fathers you would not have tolerated in this age the wagon loads of trash under which the gospel has been of late buried by ministers of your own choosing. You would have hurled out of your pulpits the men who are enemies to the fundamental doctrines of your churches, and yet are crafty enough to become your pastors and undermine the faith of a fickle and superficial generation. These men steal the pulpits of once orthodox churches, because otherwise they would have none at all. Their powerless theology cannot of itself arouse sufficient enthusiasm to enable them to build a mousetrap at the expense of their admirers, and therefore they profane the houses which your sires have built for the preaching of the gospel, and turn aside the organisations of once orthodox communities to help their infidelity: I call it by that name in plain English, for "modern thought" is not one whit better, and of the two evils I give infidelity the palm, for it is less deceptive. I beg the Lord to give back to the churches such a love to his truth that they may discern the spirits, and cast out those which are not of God. I feel sometimes like John, of whom it is said that, though the most loving of all spirits, yet he was the most decided of all men for the truth; and when he went to the bath and found that the heretic, Cerinthus, was there, he hurried out of the building, and would not tarry in the same place with him. There are some with whom we should have no fellowship, nay, not so much as to eat bread; for though this conduct looks stern and hard, it is after the mind of Christ, for the apostle spake by inspiration when he said, "If we or an angel from heaven preach to you any other gospel than that ye have received, let him be accursed." According to modern effeminacy he ought to have said, "Let him be kindly spoken with in private, but pray make no stir. No doubt the good brother has his own original modes of thought, and we must not question his liberty. Doubtless, he believes the same as we do, only there is some little difference as to terms." This is treason to Christ, treachery to truth, and cruelty to souls. If we love our Lord we shall keep his words, and stand fast in the faith, coming out from among the false teachers; nor is this inconsistent with charity, for the truest love to those who err is not to fraternise with them in their error, but to be faithful to Jesus in all things.

The love of Jesus Christ creates in men a deep attachment to the gospel, especially to the doctrines which cluster around the person of our Lord; and I think more especially to that doctrine which is the corner stone of all, namely, that Christ died in the stead of men. He who toucheth the doctrine of substitution toucheth the apple of our eye: he who denies it robs our soul of her only hope, for thence we gather all our consolation for the present and our expectation for days to come. A great force, then, held the apostle: that force was the love of Christ, and it wrought in him love to Christ in return.

Now, *this force acts proportionately in believers.* It acts in every

Christian more or less, but it differs in degree. We are all of us alive, but the vigour of life differs greatly in the consumptive and the athletic, and so the love of Jesus acts upon all regenerate men, but not to the same extent. When a man is perfectly swayed by the love of Christ he will be a perfect Christian : when a man is growingly under its influence he is a growing Christian ; when a man is sincerely affected by the love of Christ he is a sincere Christian ; but he in whom the love of Christ has no power whatever is not a Christian at all. "I thought," says one, "that believing was the main point." True, but faith worketh by love, and if your faith does not work by love it is not the faith which will save the soul. Love never fails to bloom where faith has taken root.

Beloved, you will feel the power of the love of Christ in your soul in proportion to the following points. In proportion as you *know* it. Study, then, the love of Christ : search deep and learn its secrets. Angels desire to look into it. Observe its eternity—without beginning, its immutability—without change, its infinity—without measure, its eternity—without end. Think much of the love of Christ, till you comprehend with all saints what are its breadths and lengths, and as you know it you will begin to feel its power. Its power will also be in proportion to your sense of it. Do you *feel* the love of God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost? Knowing is well, but enjoyment as the result of believing is better. Does it not sometimes force the tears from your eyes to think that Jesus loved you and gave himself for you? On the other hand does it not at times make you feel as if, like David, you could dance before the ark of the Lord, to think that the love of God should ever have been set on *you*, that Christ should die *for you*? Ah, think and think again : for you the bloody sweat, for you the crown of thorns, for you the nails, the spear, the wounds, the broken heart,—all, all for love of you who were his enemy! In proportion as your heart is tender and is sensitive to this love it will become a constraining influence to your whole life. The force of this influence will also depend very much upon the *grace* which dwells within you. You may measure your grace by the power which the love of Christ has over you. Those who dwell near their Lord are so conscious of his power over them that the very glances of his eyes fill them with holy ardour. If you have much grace you will be greatly moved by the love which gave you that grace, and wondrously sensitive to it, but he who hath little grace, as is the case with not a few, can read the story of the cross without emotion, and can contemplate Jesus' death without feeling. God deliver us from a marble heart, cold and hard. *Character* also has much to do with the measure in which we feel the constraint of Jesus' love : the more Christlike the more Christ-constrained. You must get, dear brother and sister, by prayer, through the Holy Spirit, to be like Jesus Christ, and when you do, his love will take fuller possession of you than it does at this moment, and you will be more manifestly under its constraining power.

Our last point upon this head is that wherever its energy is felt *it will operate after its kind*. Forces work according to their nature : the force of love creates love, and the love of Christ begets a kindred love. He who feels Christ's love acts as Christ acted. If thou dost really feel the love of Christ in making a sacrifice of himself thou wilt make a sacrifice

of thyself. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." We shall for our Lord's sake count all things but dross for the excellency of his knowledge. O soul, thou wilt have no choice left after thou hast once known and chosen thy Lord. That road leads to wealth, but if it does not glorify Christ thou wilt at once say, "Farewell wealth." That road leads to honour; thou wilt be famous if thou wilt take that path; but if it will bring no glory to Christ, if thou feelest the power of his love in thy soul, thou wilt say, "Farewell honour: I will embrace shame for Christ, for my one thought is to sacrifice myself for him who sacrificed himself for me."

If the love of Christ constrain you it will make you love others, for his was love to others, love to those who could do him no service, who deserved nothing at his hands. If the love of Christ constrain you, you will specially love those who have no apparent claim upon you, and cannot justly expect anything from you, but on the contrary deserve your censure. You will say, "I love them because the love of Christ constraineth me." Dirty little creatures in the gutter, filthy women polluting the streets, base men who come out of jail merely to repeat their crimes,—these are the fallen humanities whom we learn to love when the love of Christ constraineth us. I do not know how else we could care for some poor creatures, if it were not that Jesus teaches us to despise none and despair of none. Those ungrateful creatures, those malicious creatures, those abominably blasphemous and profane creatures whom you sometimes meet with and shrink from, you are to love them because Christ loved the very chief of sinners. His love to you must be reflected in your love to the lowest and vilest. He is your sun, be you as the moon to the world's night.

The love of Jesus Christ was a practical love. He did not love in thought only and in word, but in deed and in truth, and if the love of Christ constraineth us we shall throw our souls into the work and service of love; we shall be really at work for men, giving alms of our substance, enduring our measure of suffering, and making it clear that our Christianity is not mere talk, but downright work; we shall be like the bullock of the burnt offering, laid upon the altar wholly to be consumed; we shall consider nothing but how we can most completely be eaten up with the zeal of God's house, how without the reserve of one single faculty we may be entirely consumed in the service of our Lord and Master. May the Lord bring us to this.

II. THE CONSTRAINT OF WHICH WE HAVE SPOKEN WAS JUSTIFIED BY THE APOSTLE'S UNDERSTANDING. "The love of Christ constraineth us; *because we thus judge.*" Love is blind. A man may say that in the affairs of love he exercises a calm discretion, but I take leave to doubt it. In love to Christ however you may be carried right away and be as blind as you like, and yet you shall act according to the soundest judgment. The apostle saith warmly, "The love of Christ constraineth us," and yet he adds with all coolness, "*because we thus judge.*" When understanding is the basis of affection, then a man's heart is fixed and his conduct becomes in a high degree exemplary. So it is here. There is a firm basis of judgment,—the man has weighed and judged the matter as much as if the heart were out of the question; but the logical conclusion is one of

all-absorbing emotion and mastering affection as much as if the understanding had been left out of the question. His judgment was as the brazen altar, cold and hard, but on it he laid the coals of burning affection, vehement enough in their flame to consume everything. So it ought to be with us. Religion should be with a man a matter of intellect as well as of affection, and his understanding should always be able to justify the strongest possible passion of his soul, as the apostle says it did in the case of himself and brethren. They had reasons for all that they did. For, first, *he recognized substitution*: "We thus judge, that if one died for all." O brethren, this is the very sinew of Christian effort—Christ died in the sinner's stead. Christ is the surety, the sacrifice, the substitute, for men. If you take the doctrine of vicarious sacrifice out of the Christian religion I protest that nothing is left worth calling a revelation. It is the heart, the head, the bowels, the soul, the essence of our holy faith,—that the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all, and with his stripes we are healed. The apostle firmly believed this to be a matter of fact, and then out of his belief there grew an intense love to Jesus, as well there might. Did Jesus stand in my stead? Oh, how I love him. Did he die for me? Then his love hath mastered me, and henceforth it holds me as its willing captive. O sacred Substitute, I am thine, and all that I have.

In the next place *he recognised union to Christ*, for, said he, "If one died for all, then the all died," for so it runs, that is to say the all for whom Christ died died in his death. His dying in their stead was their dying; he dies for them, they die in him; he rises, they rise in him; he lives, they live in him. Now if it be really so, that you and I who have believed in Christ are one with Christ, and members of his body, that truth may be stated coolly, but like the flint it conceals a fire within it; for if we died in Jesus, we are henceforth dead to the world, to self, to everything but our Lord. O Holy Spirit, work in us this death even to the full. The apostle recognises the natural consequence of union with the dying Lord, and resolves to carry it out. Brethren, when Adam sinned we sinned, and we have felt the result of that fact; we were constituted sinners by the act of our first representative, and every day we see it to be so: every little child that is carried to the grave bears witness that death passeth upon all men, for that all have sinned in Adam, even though they have not personally sinned after the similitude of his transgression. Now, just as our sin in Adam effectively operates upon us for evil, so must our death with Christ effectively operate upon our lives for good. It ought to do so. How can I live for myself? I died more than eighteen centuries ago. I died and was buried, how can I live to the world? Eighteen hundred years ago and more the world hung me up as a malefactor; ay, and in my heart of hearts I have also crucified the world, and henceforth regard it as a dead malefactor. How shall I fall in love with a crucified world, or follow after its delights? We thus died with Christ. "Now," saith the apostle, "the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then the all died." All who were in Christ, for whom he died, died when he died, and what follows from it, but that henceforth they should not live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them, and rose again? We are one with Christ, and what he did for us we did in

him, and therefore we are dead because he died; hence we ought no longer to live in the old selfish way, but should live to the Lord alone. There is the basis upon which the intellect rests, and then the affections yield themselves to the sacred force of Jesus's dying love.

I close with the following reflections, putting them very briefly.

The first reflection is,—how different is the inference of the apostle from that of many professors. They say, "If Christ died once for all, and so finished the work of my salvation, then I am saved, and may sit down in comfort and enjoy myself, for there is no need for effort or thought." Ah, what a mercy to feel that you are saved, and then to go to sleep in the corner of your pew. A converted man, and therefore curled up upon the bed of sloth! A pretty sight surely, but a very common one. Such people have but little or no feeling for others who remain unconverted. "The Lord will save his own," say they, and they little care whether he does so or not. They appear to be dreadfully afraid of doing God's work, though there is not the slightest need for such a fear, since they will not even do their own work. These are presumptuous persons, strangers to the grace of God, who know not that a main part of salvation lies in our being saved from selfishness and hardness of heart. It is the devil's inference, that because Christ did so much for me I am now to do nothing for him; I must even beg the devil's pardon, for I scarcely think that even he is base enough to draw such an inference from the grace of God. Assuredly he has never been in a position to attempt so detestable a crime. It is to the last degree unutterably contemptible that a man who is indebted to the Lord Jesus Christ for so much should then make the only consequence of his indebtedness to be a selfish indolence. Never will a true child of God say, "Soul, take thine ease: thou art all right: what matters anything else?" Oh no, "The love of Christ constraineth us."

How much more ennobling, again, is such conduct as that of the apostle than that of many professed Christians? I am not about to judge any one, but I would beg you to judge yourselves. There are some, and I would try to hope that they may be Christians—the Lord knoweth them that are his—who do give to the cause of God, who do serve God after a fashion; but still the main thought of their life is not Christ nor his service, but the gaining of wealth. That is their chief object, and towards it all their faculties are bent. There are other church members—God forbid we should judge them—whose great thought is success in their profession. I am not condemning their having such a thought, but the chief ambition of the apostle and of those like him was not this, but something higher. The chief aim of all of us should be nothing of self, but serving Christ. We are to be dead to everything but our Lord's glory, living with this mark before us, this prize to be strained after, that Christ shall be glorified in our mortal bodies. In our business, in our studies, in everything, our motto must be, Christ, Christ, Christ. Now, is it not a far more noble thing for a man to have lived wholly unto Christ than for mammon, or honour, or for himself in any shape? I speak as unto wise men, judge ye what I say.

Do you not think also that such a pursuit as this is much more peace-giving to the spirit? People will judge our conduct, and they are sure to judge as severely as they can: if they see us zealous and self-denying

they will say of us, "Why, the man is beside himself." This will not matter much to us if we can reply, "It is for God"; or if they say, "Oh, you old sobersides; how grave you are," we shall not be offended, if we can reply, "Ah, but it is for the good of others I am sober." You will be very little distressed by sharp criticisms if you know that your motive is wholly unselfish. If you live for Christ, and for Christ alone, all the carplings of men or devils will never cast you down.

Do you not think that a life spent for Jesus only is far more worth looking back upon at the last than any other? If you call yourselves Christians how will you judge a life spent in money-making? It cannot be very much longer before you must gather up your feet in the bed and resign your soul to God. Now, suppose yourself sitting in your chamber all alone, making out the final balance-sheet of your stewardship, how will it look if you have to confess, "I have been a Christian professor; my conduct has been outwardly decent and respectable, but my chief purpose was not my Master's glory. I have lived with the view of scraping together so many thousands, and I have done it." Would you like to fall asleep and die with that as the consummation of your life? Or shall it be, "I have lived to hold up my head in society and pay my way and leave a little for my family"? Will that satisfy you as your last reflection? Brethren, we are not saved by our works, but I am speaking now upon the consolation which a man can derive from looking back upon his life. Suppose he shall have felt the power of my text, and shall be able to say, "I have been enabled by the grace of God, to which I give all the glory, to consecrate my entire being to the entire glorification of my Lord and Master; and whatever my mistakes, and they are many, and my wanderings and failures, and they are countless, yet the love of Christ has constrained me, for I judged myself to have died in him, and henceforth I have lived to him. I have fought a good fight. I have kept the faith." Why, methinks it were worth while so to die. To be constrained by the love of Christ creates a life heroic, exalted, illustrious: no, I must come down from such lofty words—it is such a life as every Christian ought to live; it is such a life as every Christian must live if he is really constrained by the love of Christ, for the text does not say the love of Christ ought to constrain us, it declares that it does constrain us. Men and brethren, if it does not constrain *you*, judge yourselves, that ye be not judged and found wanting at the last. God grant we may feel the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Colossians i. 12—29;
ii. 1—15.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—797, 176, 781.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

WHERE TRUE PRAYER IS FOUND.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 5TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee."—
2 Samuel vii. 27.

DAVID had first found it in his heart to build a house for God. Sitting in his house of cedar he resolved that the ark of God should no longer abide under curtains, but should be more suitably housed. The Lord, however, did not design that David should build his temple, though he accepted his pious intentions, and declared that it was well that it was in his heart. From which we may learn that our intentions to serve the Lord in a certain manner may be thoroughly good and acceptable, and yet we may not be permitted to carry them out. We may have the will but not the power: the aspiration but not the qualification. We may have to stand aside and see another do the task which we had chosen for ourselves, and yet we may be none the less pleasing to the Lord, who in his great love accepts the will for the deed. It is a holy self-denial which in such cases rejoices to see the Lord glorified by others, and at the Captain's bidding cheerfully stands back in the rear, when zeal had urged it to rush to the front. It is as true service not to do as to do when the Lord's word prescribes it.

The reason why David was not to build the house is not stated here, but you will find it in 1 Chronicles xxviii. 2, 3. "Then David the king stood up upon his feet, and said, Hear me, my brethren, and my people: As for me, I had in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building: but God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood." David's wars had been necessary and justifiable, and by them the people of the Lord had been delivered; but the Ever Merciful One did not delight in them, and would not use for building his temple an instrument which had been stained with blood. The great Prince of Peace would not have a warrior's hand to pile the palace of his worship,

choosing rather that a man whose mind had exercised itself in quieter pursuits should be the founder of the place of rest for the ark of his covenant of peace. He is not so short of instruments as to use a sword for a trowel, or a spear for a measuring rod, especially when these have been dyed in the blood of his creatures. In your own household affairs you do not use the same implement or utensil for opposite purposes; if David, therefore, is used to smite Philistines he is not to be employed in erecting a temple; Solomon, his son, a man of peace, is called to do that holy work. I have sometimes trembled on behalf of our own nation, and especially just now, lest its warlike propensities should disqualify it for what has hitherto appeared its highest destiny. If it should resolve to pick a quarrel and wantonly plunge itself into a bloody war, it may come to pass that our God may judge it to be unfit for the accomplishment of his purposes of grace. Even if it were granted that the war would be most just and right, yet should it be undertaken with solemn reluctance, lest it should deprive our nation of the capacity to be the preacher of righteousness and the herald of the cross. With what face can we preach the gospel of peace among the heathen if we provoke war ourselves? Little wonder would it be if the Lord should say of the English people, "Ye shall not convert the nations nor build up a church for my name, because ye delight in war and have needlessly shed blood." God grant that all things may be so ordered according to his infinite wisdom that this land may be the true Solomon among the nations, and build a temple for God, which shall enclose the whole earth, wherein every language and every nation shall be heard praising and magnifying the Lord. Labour, I pray you, O ye servants of the loving Saviour, to promote peace if haply the temporary rage of the multitude may be appeased without carnage. To return to personal cases: it may happen to any one of you to be called to pass through business or domestic trials, in which you may be altogether blameless, and yet you may at the close of them find yourself disqualified for certain prominent positions of usefulness, at least for a time. Henceforth you may not hope to accomplish certain high and noble purposes which once were laid upon your heart. God may have to say to you ever afterwards, "You use lies elsewhere. I will not employ you for this, but still I accept you, and it was well that it was in your heart;" and if he should so see fit, do not repine, but like David do all you can towards the work that the man who is to perform it may find materials ready to his hand. David gathered much of the treasure to meet the cost, and did it none the less earnestly because another name would outshine his own in connection with the temple.

Beloved friends, there is a very sweet consolation in my text for those who may be placed in circumstances similar to those of David. If by any means a man of God becomes disqualified for any form of desirable service which was upon his heart, yet nothing can disqualify him from prayer. If he find it in his heart to pray he may boldly draw near to God through the sacrifice of Christ, he may still use the way of access, which the dying body of our Lord has opened, and he may win his suit at the throne of grace. It was well for David that though, when the building of the temple was in his heart it could not be, yet when a prayer was in his heart it might be presented with the certainty of acceptance.

If thou, my brother or my sister, art denied the privilege of doing what thy heart is set upon, be not angry with God, but set thy heart towards him in prayer ; ask what thou wilt and he will give thee the desire of thine heart.

By my text three thoughts are suggested : the first is *it is well to find prayer in our heart*,—"therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee ;" secondly, *it is pleasant to be able to see how the prayer came there*,—I shall trace the rise and progress of the prayer of David ; and, thirdly, *it is most profitable to use a prayer when we find it in our heart* ; for David solemnly prayed the prayer which he discovered in his soul.

I. First, then, IT IS WELL TO FIND PRAYER IN OUR HEARTS. In no other place can true prayer be found. Prayer with the lip, prayer with bended knee and uplifted hand is nothing worth if the heart be absent. Prayer as a mere matter of form and routine is but the husk, heart-work is the kernel. Words are the oyster shell, the desire of the heart is the pearl. Do not imagine that the Lord looks down with any pleasure upon the tens of thousands of forms of prayer, whether liturgical or extempore, which are presented to him without heart : such forms rather weary him than worship him ; they are not adoration, but provocation. The God of truth can never accept an untruthful devotion. Our prayer must flow from our heart, or it will never reach the heart of God. But prayer is not found in every man's heart. Alas, many of our fellow men never pray ; and many who think they pray are yet strangers to that sacred exercise. If an angel were now suddenly to announce that he would mark every man and woman here who has never prayed I fear that many of you would be in a great fright, for fear the mark should be on you. If suddenly the complexion could change, and each prayerless person's face should gather blackness, I wonder how many there would be among us whom we should gaze upon with intense surprise ! There shall be no such Cain-like mark set upon any of you, but will you set some sort of seal upon your own conscience if you are compelled to confess, "I am one of those who have never prayed." What an acknowledgment for a rational being to make ! Twenty years of life without a prayer to the Creator of its being ! Be astonished, O heavens, and amazed O earth ! Perhaps you deny that you are thus guilty, for you have always said a prayer, and would not have gone to sleep at night if you had not done so ; then, I pray you, remember that you may have repeated holy words from your youth up, and yet may have never prayed a prayer with your heart. To pray as the Holy Ghost teaches is a very different thing from the repetition of the choicest words that the best of writers may have composed, or the utterance of random words without thought. Have we prayed with our hearts or not ? Remember, a prayerless soul is a Christless soul, and a Christless soul is a lost soul, and will soon be cast away for ever. The verses were meant for children, but I cannot forbear quoting them here, for they in simple language express my meaning :

"I often say my prayers ;
But do I ever pray ?
And do the wishes of my heart
Go with the words I say ?

"I may as well kneel down
And worship gods of stone,
As offer to the living God
A prayer of words alone.

"For words without the heart
The Lord will never hear;
Nor will he to those lips attend
Whose prayers are not sincere."

Further, let me observe that the spirit of prayer, though it is always present in every regenerated heart, is not always alike active. It is not, perhaps, to-day nor to-morrow that every Christian will be able to say, "I find in my heart to pray *this* one particular prayer unto God"; it may for the present be beyond our standard of grace, and we may therefore be unable to grasp the blessing. In some respects we are not masters of our supplications. You cannot always pray the prayer of faith in reference to any one thing; that prayer is often the distinct gift of God for an occasion. Others may ask your prayers, and sometimes you may plead very prevalently for them; but at another time that power is absent. You feel no liberty to offer a certain petition, but on the contrary feel held back in the matter. Well, be guided by this inward direction, and follow rather than press forward in such a case. There are times with us when we find it in our heart to pray a prayer, and then we do so with eagerness and assurance; but we cannot command such seasons at pleasure. How freely then does prayer come from us, as freely as the leaping water from the fountain; there is no need to say, "I long to pray," we do pray, we cannot help praying, we have become a mass of prayer. We are walking the streets and cannot pray aloud, but our heart pleads as fast as it beats; we enter our house and attend to family business, and still the heart keeps pleading as constantly as the lungs are heaving; we go to bed, and our last thought is supplication; if we wake in the night still is our soul making intercession before God, and so it continues while the visitation remains. O that it were always so. Now it is a very happy thing when the Christian finds it in his heart to pray with marked and special fervour unto God. Then he puts no pressure upon himself, nor thinks of supplication as a matter of duty; it has become a pleasant necessity, a sacred passion of the inward life, a holy breathing of the soul, not to be restrained. So it should always be, but, alas, most of us have to mourn that in the matter of prayer we are the subjects of many changeful moods. O that we had learned more perfectly how to be praying always in the Holy Ghost.

The presence of living prayer in the heart indicates seven things about that heart upon which we will speak with great brevity.

First, prayer in the heart proves that the heart is *renewed*. True prayer dwells not in a dead, corrupt, stony heart. If thou findest in thy heart to pray a prayer unto God thou hast assuredly been born again. "Behold he prayeth," is one of the first and one of the surest marks of the new birth. The faintest movement of the pulse proves that life still remains in a drowning man, and though prayer be weak, feeble, fragmentary, yet if it be there at all the soul lives unto God. Though to your apprehension your prayer is so poor and broken and unworthy that it cannot be accepted, yet the desire of the soul towards

God is an index of spiritual life most hopeful and instructive. Have hope, brother, as long as you can pray, for none who pray believingly, in the name of Jesus, can ever be cast into hell. He whom faith in Jesus has taught to cry to God shall never hear him say, "Depart, ye cursed," for hath not the Lord said, "Whosoever calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved"? Be glad, therefore, if you find it in your heart to pray, for it proves that the root of the matter is in you.

To find prayer in the heart proves next a *reconciled* heart. David might have been in a pet with God and have said, "If I cannot build a temple I will do nothing, for I have set my heart upon it, and I have already laid up treasure for it. It is a laudable project, and it has had the sanction of the prophet, and I am hardly used in having my design rejected." There are some professors who would do a great thing if they might, but if they are not permitted to act a shining part they are in the sulks and angry with their God. David when his proposal was set aside found it in his heart not to murmur, but to pray. Job asks concerning the hypocrite, "Will he always call upon God?" and thus he meant to say that only true and loyal hearts will continue to pray when things go hard with them. Let this be a test for you and for me. Canst thou pray, brother, now that the delight of thine eyes has been cut off by death? Canst thou pray now that thy substance is diminished and thy bodily health is failing? Then I take it as a sign that thou hast submitted thyself unto God and art at peace with him, being reconciled to him by his grace. To cease from complaining and to give the heart to prayer is the sign of a soul renewed and reconciled.

Prayer is also the index of a *spiritual* heart. David sat in his house of cedar: it was costly and carved with great art, but it did not draw his mind away from God. It has too often happened that prospering professors have become proud professors, and have forgotten God. When they were poor they associated with Christian brethren, whom they felt pleasure in recognizing, but now they have gotten a large estate they no longer know the poor people of God, and they spend their Sabbaths where they can meet with a little "society," and move among their "equals" as they call them, they being themselves so very much superior to the holy men and women whom once they had in honour. Such folks become high and mighty like Nebuchadnezzar, and as they walk their grounds or sit in their painted chambers they say, "Behold this great Babylon which I have builded." A "self-made man," risen from the ranks, come to have a name like the name of the great men that are upon the face of the earth: is not this something? Oftentimes hath it happened that these things have turned away the hearts of professors from the God who loaded them with benefits. It was not so with David. In his cedar palace he found it in his heart to pray. The more he had the more he loved his God; the more he received the more he desired to render unto the Lord for his benefits. Plants when they are pot-bound become poor weak things, and so do men's hearts when they are earth-bound, doting upon their riches. As a traveller finds it hard to move when his feet stick in the mud of a miry way, so do some men make small progress heavenward because they are hindered by their own wealth. Happy is that man who has riches but does not suffer riches to have him: who

uses wealth and does not abuse it by idolizing it, but seasons all with the word of God and prayer.

Prayer in the heart also proves an *enlightened* heart. A man who does not pray is in the dark; he knoweth not his own wants, else would he make supplication. If he understood his own danger, the temptations which surround him, and the corruptions which are within him, he would be incessantly in prayer. He who hath left off praying hath surely lost his wits. If the Holy Ghost has taught us anything he has taught us this, that we must pray without ceasing. David prayed, too, as an enlightened man, because he felt that devotion was due to God. Since the Lord had done so much for him he must worship and adore: "Therefore hath thy servant," saith he, "found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee." He who is well taught by the Spirit of God knows his position to be that of a humble dependent, who is bound to reverence his God with all his heart; and hence he daily sings, "Thy vows are upon me, O God, I will render praise unto thee."

The heart in which prayer is found constantly welling up is also a *lively* heart. We do not all possess lively hearts, nor do we all keep them when we get them, for some men appear to have fatty degeneration of the heart, after a spiritual manner, since their heart acts very feebly in prayer. They are lethargic and lifeless in devotion. Do we not all find ourselves at times in a cold state in reference to prayer? Brothers, I believe that when we cannot pray it is time that we prayed more than ever; and if you answer, "But how can that be?" I would say—pray to pray, pray for prayer, pray for the spirit of supplication. Do not be content to say, "I would pray if I could"; no, but if you cannot pray, pray till you can. He who can row down stream with a flowing tide and a fair wind is but a poor oarsman compared with the man who can pull against wind and tide, and nevertheless make headway. This our soul must endeavour to do. But, beloved, how delicious it is when you can pray, and cannot leave off; when your heart pours forth devotion as the roses shed their odours, or the sun gives his light. I love to feel my soul on the wing like the birds in spring, which are always singing and flitting from bough to bough, full of life and vigour. Oh to have the soul mounting on eagle's wings, and no longer groping in the earth like a mole. To be instant, constant, eager at prayer—this is health, vigour, and delight. To feel the heart in prayer like the chariots of Amminadib, outstripping the wind—this is a joy worth worlds.

Beloved, this finding in the heart to pray proves, in the sixth place, that the heart is *in communion with God*; for what is prayer but the breath of God in man returning whence it came. Prayer is a telephone by which God speaks in man. His heaven is far away, but his voice sounds in our soul. Prayer is a phonograph: God speaks into our soul, and then our soul speaks out again what the Lord has spoken. Conversation must always be two-sided. God speaketh to us in this book—we must reply to him in prayer and praise. If you do not pray, my brother, why then you have shut the gates of heaven against yourself, and there is neither coming in nor going out between you and your Lord: but prayer keeps up a heavenly commerce acceptable to God and enriching to your own souls. Do you find yourself mightily moved to pray? Then the Lord is very near to you; the Beloved has come into

his garden to eat his pleasant fruits—take care to feast him with your love. Prayer in the heart is the echo of the footsteps of the Bridegroom of our souls who is seeking communion with us. Open wide the doors of your soul and let him in, and then detain him and constrain him, saying, “Abide with us.”

When we find prayer in the heart, we may know that our heart is *accepted of God*, and the prayer too. Brother, when a desire comes to thee again and again and again, take it as a favourable omen regarding thy supplication. If the Lord should prompt thee to any one desire especially, laying thy child perhaps more than usual upon thy heart, or causing the name of a friend constantly to occur to thee, so that thou findest thyself frequently praying for him—take this as a token from the Lord that he would have thee turn thy thoughts in that direction, and that a blessing is in store for thee. If a certain church which seems to need revival is laid upon thy soul, or a township or a district, mark well the fact. Suppose thou findest thy heart going out towards a special country or city, bearing thy mind thither and working to pray with tears and entreaties, grieving because of its sin, and entreating that God would remember and forgive, be thou sure that this is a prophecy of good to that place, and do thou redouble thy petitions. When the gale blows the navigator spreads his sail to catch the wind, and when the Spirit, who bloweth where he listeth, comes upon thee influencing thee to this or that, be sure to spread all sail. Reckon that the inclination to pray is the foretaste of the coming blessing; as coming events cast their shadows before them, thy desire is the shadow of the mercy which God is sending down to thee. He moves thee to pray for it because he himself is about to give it.

Thus I have shown that it is well when we find it in our hearts to pray a prayer, for it proves the heart to be in many respects in a healthy condition.

II. Now, secondly, IT IS PLEASANT TO BE ABLE TO SEE HOW THE PRAYER CAME INTO THE HEART. “I find it in my heart,” says David. Well, David, how did it come there? I answer as he did not, that any true prayer which is found in the human heart comes there *by the Holy Ghost*. If there be anything excellent in us, even if it be only a desire to pray acceptably, it is of the Holy Spirit’s creation, and unto him be all the praise. But the *modus operandi*, the way in which the Spirit operates upon us is somewhat in this fashion. First of all he puts the promise into *the word of God*. David tells us very plainly that it was because God had revealed such and such promises that therefore saith he, “hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee.” The Lord gives the promise, and that becomes the parent of our prayer. For first there are some mercies *we should never have thought of praying for* if he had not promised them. They would never have suggested themselves to us, and we should not have known our need of them unless the supply had taught us, and the promise of God itself incited us to the desire. There are other mercies for which *we should not have dared to pray* if the promise had not encouraged us. We could not have had the heart to ask such great things if the Lord had not promised them to us. So that the word of God suggests the desire and then encourages us to hope that the desire will certainly be fulfilled. Moreover when a

promise comes very close home to a man as it did to David when it was spoken personally to him by the prophet, it vivifies the soul, causes the mind to realize the blessing, and both intensifies desire and gives grasp and grip to faith. *We should not have felt the boon to be real* had it not been placed before us in plain words. Brethren, this is how our prayers come into our heart. The word of God suggests them, encourages us to seek them, and then gives us a realizing power so that we plead with eagerness and believe with force.

In saying "therefore" David means not only that the word of God had put the prayer into his mind but that *his whole meditation* had led him to the finding of this prayer in his heart. Had he not been sitting before the Lord in quiet thought he might never have noticed the work of the Spirit upon his soul, but inward searchings brought the right prayer to light. Will you kindly look through the chapter while I very briefly sum up its contents and show that each item excited David to pray? When the king sat before the Lord and spake out his heart, his first word was about the Lord's *past goodness* to him and his own insignificance,—“Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?” Brethren, who are we that God should have been so good to us? But inasmuch as his grace to us has been amazing, do we not find it in our heart to pray a prayer to him that he would bless us still more? Can you not enquire of the Lord in the words of the hymn which we sang just now—

“After so much mercy past
Canst thou let me sink at last?”

He hath been mindful of us, he will bless us. Let our memory of his *past* lovingkindness excite us to prayer for present and future favours.

David then passed on to speak of the *greatness of the promise*: “This was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come.” We also have received exceeding great and precious promises, and since God has promised so much, will we not be much in prayer? Shall he be large in promising and shall we be narrow in asking? Shall he stand before us and say, “Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing, ye shall receive,” and will we be content with slender, starved petitions? Beggars seldom need pressing to beg, and when a promise is given them they usually put the widest possible construction upon it, and urge it with great vehemence; will it not be well to take a leaf out of their book? Come, brethren, the argument is strong with those who have spiritual sense—the greatness of the promise encourages us to find many a prayer in our heart.

Then he speaks of the *surprising “manner” of God*. “Is this the manner of man, O Lord God?” He saw that God acted far more graciously than the most generous human beings act towards their fellows. He perceived that “as high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are God's ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts,” and therefore he opened his mouth wide in prayer. Was he not right in so doing, and are we right, my brother, if we do not imitate his example? We are advised by the wise man not to go into our brother's house in the day of our calamity, and the like wisdom would move us

not to ask too much from friends and neighbours; but no such prudence is needful towards our Friend above; to him we may come at all hours, and to him we may offer the largest requests. Since the Lord dealeth not as men deal, but giveth liberally and upbraideth not, since he openeth the windows of the treasury of heaven, and is pleased to make no stint whatever in the showers of his liberality, let us wait upon him continually. His unspeakable love should encourage us to abound in prayer.

Then the king goes on to speak of *God's free grace*, which was another argument to pray. "For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things to make thy servant know them." The Lord had entered into covenant with him, not because David had merited so great an honour, but entirely for his own mercy's sake. David recognizes the freeness and sovereignty of the grace, and seems to say, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight. If thou hast loved me so, then am I bold to ask great things of thee. If thou waitest not for the merit of man, nor for human deservings, then will I ask thee still further to bless me, unworthy though I am, to the praise of the glory of thy name." Pray mightily, my brethren, since God sits on a throne of grace. When the choicest treasures are to be had for the asking, who can refuse to pray?

Then he proceeded to mention *the greatness of God*, "Wherefore thou art great, O Lord God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee." Surely, to a great God we should bring great prayers. We dishonour him by the fowness of our petitions, and the littleness of our desires. My soul, enlarge thy desires; be hungry, be thirsty, be greedy after divine grace, for whatever thou desirest thou shalt have, provided it be indeed for thy good. Thy desire to obtain shall be the test of thy capacity to receive. Brethren, we have not because we ask not, or because we ask amiss. "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name," said the Lord Jesus to his disciples, and he might say the same to us now; for all we have ever asked comes to next to nothing compared with what he is prepared to give, compared with what he will give when once he has tutored us into something like largeness of heart in prayer, like that of Solomon, of whom we read, "God gave him largeness of heart even as the sand which is on the sea shore." We need to be delivered from narrow conceptions of God, and limited desires in prayer, that we may ask of infinity with suitable capacity of soul, and so may receive grace upon grace, and be filled with all the fulness of God.

David closed his meditation by speaking of *God's love to his people*, saying, "And what one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for thy land, before thy people, which thou redeemedst to thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods? For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel to be a people unto thee for ever: and thou, Lord, art become their God." Well, since the Lord loves his people so intensely, we may well be encouraged to ask great things for ourselves, and especially to seek great things for the church. We are no strangers to God now, his chosen are neither aliens nor foreigners, they are his children, dear to his heart; and if we, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto our children, how much more sure is it that our heavenly Father will give

good gifts to them that ask him? When you pray for Zion plead for great prosperity, and speak with boldness, for you are asking blessings upon those whom God delights to bless, asking prosperity for that church which is as the apple of his eye.

I will sum up this point as to the pleasure of seeing how prayer comes to be in our heart, by briefly tracing the line of beauty along which it runs. First of all the thought and purpose of blessing arises in the heart of God: David perceived that to be the case, for in the twenty-first verse he says, "For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things." Prayer owes its origin to the heart of God. The next stage is reached when it is revealed by inspiration; the Lord sent Nathan to tell David of his gracious intent towards him. The thought has passed, you see, from God's secret purpose into God's revealed word, and now it filters into the heart of David, and David sends it back to God in prayer. Prayer, like our Lord, comes forth from God and returns to God. That is the pedigree and history of all true supplication. It is like the mist which you see in the early morning, rising from the plains towards heaven in the form of clouds, like incense from an altar. How came it there? First of all, the moisture was in the heavens, in the secret treasures of God. Then came a day when it fell in drops of rain, and did not return void, but watered the earth. Afterwards, when the blessed sun shone forth, it steamed up again, to return to the place from whence it came. The clouds are like the divine decree—who shall enter into the secret place where Jehovah hideth his purposes? The rain is like the word, with its sparkling drops of precious promises, the outcome of the mysterious purposes of God. These revealed blessings we see standing in pools in the Scriptures. Turn to the Book or listen to the Lord's servants whom he helps to speak, and you shall hear a sound of abundance of rain. This rain watereth the soul of man, and when the warm love of God comes shining on the saturated heart it uprises in earnest petitions. Prayer is never lost, for though the mist which rises in yonder valley may never fall again into the same place, it drops somewhere; and so true prayer, though it come not back into the offerer's own bosom, is fruitful in good in some way or other. The result of honest hearty prayer may not be distinctly this or that according to your mind or mine, but it is always good; supplication is never wasted, it is preserved in the divine reservoir, and in due time its influence visits the earth and waters it with "the river of God, which is full of water." When you find a rare flower by the roadside, and wonder how it came there, for it is no indigenous weed but a fair stranger from another clime, it is pleasant to trace out its way to the place it beautifies; and even so when you find a prayer in your heart, it is gladsome to see how it comes forth from the heart of God, by the word of God, to blossom in the garden of your soul.

III. In the the third place IT IS VERY PROFITABLE TO USE A PRAYER WHEN WE FIND IT IN OUR HEART. Notice the phraseology of my text. He says, "Thy servant hath found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee." Not to *say* this prayer, but to *pray* this prayer. There is great force in the expression. Some prayers are never prayed, but are like arrows which are never shot from the bow. Scarcely may I call them prayers, for they are such as to form, and matter, and verbiage, but

they are said, not prayed. The praying of prayer is the main matter. Sometimes, beloved, we may have a prayer in our hearts and may neglect the voice of the Lord within our soul, and if so we are great losers.

What does praying a prayer mean? It means, first, that you present it to God with *fervency*. Pray as if you meant it, throw your whole soul into the petition. Entreat the Lord with tears and cries. If you do not prevail at first, yet come to him importunately again and again with the resolve that since he has written the prayer in your heart you will take no denial. Heat your prayers red hot. In naval warfare, in the old time, our men of war fired red hot shot; try that system, for nothing is so powerful in prayer as fervency and importunity.

Pray also *spiritually*; for the text saith, "I have found it in my heart to pray *this* prayer *unto* thee." It is of no use pray to yourself or to the four walls of your room. Some persons even pray to those who are around them, like the preacher of whose prayer the remark was made that "it was one of the finest prayers that ever was presented to a Boston audience." I am afraid many prayers are presented to audiences rather than to God. This should not be. Moreover, when you find a prayer in your heart do not talk it over nor say to another, "I feel such and such a desire"—but go and pour it out before God; speak it into the divine ear, realise that God is there as distinctly as if you could see him, for that is the way to make a proper use of the prayer which is in your heart.

Pray with *specialty*. The text indicates that—"I have found it in my heart to pray *this* prayer." Know what you pray. Prayer is not putting your hand into a bag and pulling out what comes first. Oh, no; there must be definite desires and specific requests. Think carefully about it and ask for what you want and for nothing else but what you need. Pray *this* prayer. David had a promise about his house and his prayer was about his house that God would bless and establish it. Much of what we think to be prayer is really playing at praying. The archers in the English armies of old with their arrows a cloth-yard long, when they met the foe took steady aim, and sorely they galled the foe. Give your little boy his bow and arrow, and what does he do? He shoots at random and sends his arrows away, for he plays at archery. A good deal of praying is of that sort, there is no steadily taking aim at the white and drawing the bow with strength, and watching the arrow with anxiety. Lord, teach us to pray.

We ought to pray, too, dear friends, when we find prayer in our hearts, with much *boldness*. He says, "I found in my heart to pray," that is, he had the heart to pray, the courage to pray: the promise influenced him to make bold with God. Some men fail in reverence for God, but far more fail in holy boldness towards God. Men who are mighty for God are generally famous for courage with him. Look at Luther; they say it was wonderful to hear him preach, but a hundred times more so to hear him pray. There was an awful reverence about that heroic man, but there was also such a childlike simplicity of daring that he seemed as though he did really lay hold of God. That is the way: try it in your chamber this afternoon. Be bold with God, find it in your heart to pray *this* prayer unto him.

And do so *promptly*. Let promptitude mark your prayer as it did that

of David. He did not wait a week or two after he had obtained the promise ; he went straight away and sat down before the Lord, began to plead the divine word, and said, "Do as thou hast said." He found the petition in his heart, and before it could lose its way again he brought it before God. He was studying his soul, and as he observed its movements he saw a prayer lift up its head. "Ah," said he, "I will seize it," and he held it fast and presented it before God, and so obtained a blessing.

I suggest, dear friends, to those whose hearts feel touched in the matter, that we should to-day make special supplication to God as to the peace of nations, now so miserably endangered. You will meet as teachers in the school, you will meet in the classes, and others of you will be at home in meditation this afternoon ; but you can all in various ways help in the common intercession. At this moment it is upon my heart very heavily to pray this prayer to God, and I wish you would all make a point of joining in it : "Send us peace in our days, good Lord." Not as politicians, but as followers of Christ, we are bound to entreat our Lord to prevent the cruel war which is now threatened. A curse will surely fall upon all who are causing the strife, but blessed are the peace-makers. I believe that if all Christians would join in pleading with God they would do much more than all the public meetings and all the petitions to the Houses of Parliament or to the Queen will ever accomplish. O Lord, prevent war, we pray thee.

Another thing : during this week the various societies are holding their public meetings, and I suggest, if you find it in your hearts, that you spend a little extra time in praying to God to bless his church and its mission work. There will, also, be meetings held of great importance this week, in connection with certain religious bodies. There are denominations which are sadly diseased with scepticism, but a healthy love for the truth remains with many, and therefore there will come a struggle between the evangelical and the philosophical parties : this week will witness such a struggle. Pray God to send the conquest to the right, to strengthen hesitating brethren, and to give decision to those who have long been too timorous in their action. Pray that power and guidance from on high may be given to those who hold the orthodox faith. I find it in my heart so to pray, and shall be glad to know that others are agreeing with me.

Find it in your hearts, too, at this time to pray for the work of this our own church, and I call special attention to the work of our col-porteurs. We have now nearly ninety brethren going from village to village, from house to house, selling the word of God, and preaching it to those who in the hamlets might otherwise be left without the gospel. Find it in your hearts to invoke a blessing upon them ; and, in fine, if there be anything that is more upon your heart than another, be wise enough to hedge in a quarter of an hour in order to pray the prayer unto the Lord. Shut yourself up and say, "I have business to do with the Master. I feel a call within my ear to speak with the King." Beloved brethren, when such a season comes to you, I would most humbly but most affectionately ask those of you who are benefited by my ministry to whisper my name into the King's ear, for I have much need of his grace and help. May the Lord accept your petitions, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

UNDERNEATH.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 12TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Underneath are the everlasting arms.”—Deuteronomy xxxiii. 27.

GOD surrounds his children on all sides: they dwell in him. The passage before us shows that the Lord is *above*, for we read, “There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky.” Assuredly he is *around* them, for “The eternal God is thy refuge;” and he is *before* them, for “He shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them.” Here according to the text the Lord is also *under* his saints, for “Underneath are the everlasting arms.” “Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations,” and by thee we are everywhere surrounded as the earth by the atmosphere.

“Within Thy circling power I stand;
On every side I find thy hand;
Awake, asleep, at home, abroad,
I am surrounded still with God.”

The verse which contains our text should be interpreted somewhat after this fashion: “The eternal God is thy dwelling-place, or thy rest, and underneath are the everlasting arms.” The parallel passage is that verse in the Song wherein the bride exclaims, “His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me.” The soul hath come to its resting-place in God, and feels itself to be supported by the divine strength. The heart has learned to abide in Christ Jesus to go no more out for ever, but to lean on his bosom both day and night. It is somewhat in the condition of Noah's dove which, when weary, was about to drop into the all-destroying waters, but Noah put out his hand and plucked her in unto him into the ark; and when she was all safe, in the hollow of his hands, held by her preserver with a firm but tender grasp, she found in that place a refuge which surrounded her and upheld her from below. The hands covered her on all sides and came beneath her too. Even thus the hand of God sustains all those who dwell in the secret place of the Most High and abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

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I am going, however, to take the words just as they stand in our own authorized version, and to consider them apart from the context. I ask your most careful consideration of them, for they must be very full of meaning, and very emphatic in their force. The words are placed at the end of Moses' song, and they are its crown and climax. He had wound himself up to the highest pitch of poetic excitement and spiritual fervour, and this passage is the result. He had spoken grandly before concerning the separate tribes, and the words which fell from his lips are unspeakably rich ; but now he is about to close, and therefore he pours forth his loftiest strains and utters full and deep meanings, the ripest and choicest fruit of a lifetime of communion with God. As our Lord ascended to heaven blessing his disciples, so did his servant Moses before climbing to Pisgah pour out a torrent of benedictions full and deep, inspired by the divine Spirit. It is not possible, therefore, that the language can be too greatly prized. The words mean all that we can make them mean, the nectar of their consolation is altogether inexhaustible ; may God the Holy Spirit help us to weigh and measure them, and then to distil their inner sense and drink of the spiced wine of his pomegranate.

"Underneath are the everlasting arms." I shall handle the text in this fashion. *Where?* "Underneath:" *What?* "The everlasting arms:" *When?* They are underneath us now and evermore: and if it be so, *what then?*

I. First let us attend to the question:—WHERE? "*Underneath.*" Now, "*underneath*" is *a region into which we cannot see*. We glance downwards, and the dead cold earth stops our gaze. When we are heavy in spirit we fix our eyes upon the ground and look, and look, and look, but even an eagle's glance cannot see far below. Scarce can we peer beneath the thin green sod, the bottom of a grave is well nigh the full range of mortal vision. The under world is mysterious, we associate the subterranean with all that is dark and hidden, and because of this *it is often regarded as terrible*. A man scarcely ever fears that which he can see in proportion to his dread of what he cannot see. Hence our alarm at the "*underneath.*" What may be underneath us when we leave this sunlit region for the grave's o'ershadowing vault? What will happen to us in eternity? Life will soon end: what is death? What is the immediate result of death? What shall we feel when we are traversing those tracks unknown, and finding our way to the judgment seat of God? Not knowing, except that little which has been revealed to us, we are all too apt to conjecture terrors and invent horrors, and so to begin trembling concerning that which we do not understand. What a comfort it is to be told by the voice of inspiration that "*Underneath are the everlasting arms!*" Poets have usually been in a gloomy humour when picturing the under-world, and imagination is very apt to spin a black and tangled thread. You have read of caverns dark, where the bodies of men are fast detained, of which caverns death has the key. Of this the grim Anglo-Saxon poet wailed the warning note—

"Loathsome is that earth-house,
And grim within to dwell;
There thou shalt dwell,
And worms shall divide thee."

You have heard of gloomy ruins where the night-raven for ever sits and croaks; of corridors where prisoners incessantly rattle their chains to the dolorous music of sullen groans and hollow moans. We have been afraid of death because of the horrors with which our ignorance has surrounded it, and dismayed at the future because of the mysteries which darken it. Be comforted. Our text, like a lamp, reveals the abyss of death and uplifts the veil of the future; follow its gleam, and you will see how it dispels the darkness. If you are a child of God you may descend without fear into the lowest depths: even if like Jonah you had to cry, "I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever," yet you need not be dismayed, for "Underneath are the everlasting arms." If you were called to take some such awful journey as Virgil and Dante have fabled in their poems, when their heroes descended into the dread Avernus, you need not tremble, though it were said of you as of them,

"Along the illuminated shade
Darkening and lone their way they made."

If, I say, you were bound to traverse the sepulchral vaults, and all the gloomy dungeons of Hades, yet you need not fear, for "Underneath are the everlasting arms." Mystery of mysteries! thou art no longer terrible to us, because the light of lights is shining upon thee. Depths unfathomable, we no longer fear to pass through you, for there is One whose love is deeper than the depths beneath as it is higher than the heights above, and he hath said, "I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring them up from the depths of the sea." We gladly take our journey downward at the call of God, and without fear we pass through the gates of the tomb, and enter the doors of the shadow of death, for "Underneath are the everlasting arms."

"Underneath"—the word *arouses thought and enquiry*. Everything ought to be sound, solid, and substantial there. "Underneath" must be firm, for if that fails we fail indeed. We have been building, and our eyes have been gladdened with the rising walls, and with the towering pinnacles; but what if something should be rotten "underneath"? Great will be the fall thereof, if we have built as high as heaven, if the sand lie underneath, yielding and shifting in the day of flood.

"Underneath" is the great matter to which the architect, if he be wise, will give his best attention. And truly, brethren, when you and I begin to examine into our graces and our professions, that word "underneath" suggests many a testing question. Is it all right with us as to the root of the matter—"underneath"? If not, the fair flower above ground will wither very speedily. The seed has sprung up hastily, but how is the soil underneath? for if there be no depth of earth the scorching sun will soon dry up the superficial harvest. "Underneath," though it be mysterious, is also intensely important, and hence the great joy of being able to say by faith, "Yes, 'underneath' is well secured; we have trusted in God and we shall not be confounded; we have relied upon the eternal promises and they cannot fail; we have rested on the infinite merits of the atoning sacrifice of God's dear Son, and we shall never be ashamed of our hope." Happy is he who rests upon the everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure, for with him all is safe under-

neath; and, though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, he need not fear, but may patiently hope and quietly wait for the salvation of God.

For a period we may be content with superficial pleasures, but there are times of trial when we have to fall back upon something deeper and more reliable: earthly props give way in their season, and we need superior sustaining power. The carnal mind meets with an hour when "the proud helpers do stoop under him"; and believers too, in proportion as they foolishly lean upon an arm of flesh, find their confidences departing; then it is that we feel the value of divine upholdings, and rejoice that "Underneath are the everlasting arms." Let us look more closely into this most important matter.

"Underneath are the everlasting arms." That is, first, as *the foundation of everything*. If you go down, down, to discover the basement upon which all things rest you come ere long to "the everlasting arms." The things which are seen are stayed up by the invisible God. This outward visible universe has no power to stand for a single instant if he does not keep it in being. By him all things consist. There are no forces apart from God's power, no existences apart from his will. He bears up the pillars of the universe. He alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea. He maketh Arcturus, Orion, and the Pleiades, and the chambers of the south. Foolish are those philosophers who think that they can reach the essence and soul from which visible things were evolved, unless they bow before the invisible God. He is the foundation of creation, the fountain and source of being, the root and basement of existence. "Underneath" everything "are the everlasting arms."

Most true is this with regard to his church. He chose her and redeemed her to himself: the very idea of a church is from the Lord alone. As a temple he devised her architecture, saying, "I will lay thy foundations with sapphires"; and he hath built up her every stone by his own power; her walls he sustains against her enemies, so that the gates of hell cannot prevail against her, for the foundation of God standeth sure. The foundation of every true church is the Lord himself, the Highest himself doth establish her. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved. "Underneath are the everlasting arms."

Blessed be God, what is true of the church as a corporate body is true of every member of the church. There abides no spiritual life in the world which is not founded upon the everlasting arms. Beloved, if the life of God be in you, if you search deep and go to the basis of it, you will find that your life is staying itself and drawing its constant nurture, yea, deriving its very existence, from the life of the eternal God. Jesus says, "Because I live, ye shall live also." Your life is the life of God in you; for the divine seed is the foundation of all spiritual life. Beware, then, of harbouring in your heart anything which hath not underneath it the everlasting arms. If there be any hope let it be founded on the everlasting covenant of God; if there be any joy let it well up from the everlasting love of God; if there be any confidence let it be stayed upon the everlasting strength of Jehovah; if there be any service rendered, let it be according to the everlasting commandment. If in your soul there be any grace, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, suffer none of

these matters to be superficial or pretentions, the creation of your own native strength, but let them be all founded upon the work of the Holy Ghost in your soul; in fact, let it be said of each of them, "Underneath are the everlasting arms." Nothing will serve our turn in the trials of life, the terrors of death, or the solemnities of the last great day, except that which hath underneath it the everlasting arms. See how the nations reel when God no longer sustains them: "he removeth the mountains and they know not, he overturneth them in his anger." See how those churches fly into apostasy which have not underneath them the everlasting arms, they are quenched as the fire of thorns, and only a smoke remaineth. Did not Jesus say, "Every plant that my Father hath not planted shall be rooted up"? See how hypocritical professors disappear like the morning mist when the sun ariseth. Nothing will abide the day of the Lord's coming unless its foundation be laid in the eternal God. The Lord help us to know what this meaneth, so that we may be like the wise man who digged deep and built his house upon a rock.

Again we may read the words, "Underneath are the everlasting arms," in the sense of being *the bottom and end and object of everything*. If in faith you search into divine providence, however dark and trying it may appear, you will soon find that underneath it are the everlasting arms. Satan may be mining, but God is undermining; even under the deep devices of hell the everlasting arms are to be found. Satan's craft is deep to us, but it is very shallow to the Lord, whose wisdom goes far deeper than all the cunning of the prince of darkness. The evils and errors which are in the world should not cause us to despair of the ultimate victory of the truth, for beneath them still there is the immutable decree of the Ever-living and the Ever-blessed; and that decree shall be accomplished whoever may oppose it; hath he not said, "I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear"? His purpose shall stand, he will do all his pleasure. He worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will. Trace your present trials below their surface, trace them to the deeps instead of groaning over their outward appearance, and you will find that underneath each trouble there is a faithful purpose and a kind intent; yea, beneath the utmost depths of distress and grief God is still at work in love to your soul, "From seeming evil still educing good, and better still, and better still, in infinite progression." Underneath the best events are the arms of love to make them good, and underneath the worst that can happen are the selfsame everlasting arms to moderate and overrule them. As the design, and object of all, "underneath are the everlasting arms."

I take the text, "Underneath are the everlasting arms," to mean next that the arms of God are there as *the preservation of his people*. His people sometimes appear to themselves to be in very great danger, but it is written, "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." Certain of the saints are set in very high places, and their brain might well be turned, so that they would fall; but they shall not slip with their feet, for God upholdeth the righteous. If under deep depression of spirit and sore travail of heart their feet should be almost gone, what a blessing it is to think that "underneath are the

everlasting arms." Sometimes faith walks upon a very slender thread high up above the ways of common men; poising her balancing pole of experience, she tries to keep her feet, but her satisfaction is that even if she should slip for awhile, and her joy should fail, yet there is a net beneath her which will receive her in her fall, so that she shall not be utterly dashed in pieces. "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not" is the gracious safeguard of those who fall, as Peter did, when Satan has them in his sieve. The people of God must and shall be safe. Satan may cast them down, but God shall save them ere they fall into perdition. Let us walk carefully none the less because of this. Let us watch well our footsteps as much as if our preservation entirely depended upon ourselves, but let us ever look alone to our Lord, knowing that he alone keepeth the feet of his saints. Holiness, strength of faith, and ultimate perfection are the things which we must daily aim at, but it is a blessed consolation that when through infirmity or carelessness we do not fully maintain our consecrated walk we are not therefore cast away for ever, for it is written, "Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand." "Underneath are the everlasting arms."

That leads me to read my text in the fourth sense as teaching us that the everlasting arms are *the rest of his people*. If these everlasting arms are always outstretched to preserve me lest I totter in weakness and fall into destruction, then on those arms let me lean my whole weight for time and for eternity. That is the practical lesson of this choice word. Repose yourselves, beloved, in those arms which even now are embracing you. Wherefore vex your heart when you may be free from care? Underneath everything your Father's arms are placed—what, then, can fret you? Why are you disquieted when you might dwell at ease and inherit the earth? Are you afraid to rest where the universe resteth? Are not your Father's arms a sufficient pillow for you? Do you think that it is not safe to be at peace when the love and might of God, like two strong arms, are stretched out for your upholding, and the divine voice whispers to you "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him"? His own word to his prophets is, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem." Will you not accept the comfort which he sends by his Spirit, and bids his servants impart to you? When God himself doth rest in his love will not you rest in it, and shall it not again be proven that "we that have believed do enter into rest"? Is not the Lord Jesus our peace? Why, then, are we troubled? Well may you lie down to sleep in peace when underneath you are the everlasting arms. Well may your spirit be filled with composure and become indifferent to outward trials when you are thus upborne. Blow ye winds and toss ye waves, the barque cannot sink, or if it did sink it could not sink to our destruction, we should only drop into the great Father's hand, for underneath even the sinking vessel are the everlasting arms. Now, let the earth reel with earthquake, or open wide her mouth to swallow us up quick, we need not fear to descend into her dreariest gulf, since underneath us still would be the everlasting arms. What a fulness of rest this secures to the believing people of God!

I will fetch from the text one more meaning while I am speaking upon the position of these arms. The text seems to give us a promise of *exaltation*

and uplifting. We may be very low and greatly cast down, but “underneath are the everlasting arms.” The merciful God is great at a dead lift. “He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people.” Who can tell how high a man may be lifted up—to what sublime elevations he may safely ascend when the Lord makes his feet like hind’s feet that he may stand upon his high places? If still underneath him are the everlasting arms he may safely obey the word, “Get thee up into the high mountains.” He may outsoar the eagle, mounting higher and higher till he has left the sun like a speck beneath his feet, and still underneath him shall be the everlasting arms. Therefore higher, and yet higher may we hourly ascend in thought, in joy, in holiness, in likeness to our God; this is meant to encourage us to rise, since there can be no danger while the arms of God are underneath. This then, my brethren, is where we may expect to find the strength and power of God: it is underneath us, bearing us up. We may not always see it, for the underneath is hidden from our sight, but surely as in secret the Lord upholds the huge columns of the universe so he upbearth all his own servants, and their concerns. “Underneath are the everlasting arms.”

II. Secondly let us meditate upon WHAT is it which is beneath us. *The everlasting arms.* What is meant by this? I hope the gentlemen who are so ingenious in toning down the word “everlasting” will not meddle with my text. A new way of reading the Bible has been invented in these highly enlightened days. I used to get on exceedingly well with the book years ago, for it seemed clear and plain enough, but modern interpreters would puzzle us out of our wits and out of our souls, if they could, by their vile habit of giving new meanings to plain words. Thank God, I keep to the old simple way; but I am informed that the inventors of the new minimizing glasses manage to read the big words small, and they have even read down the word “everlasting” into a little space of time. Everlasting may be six weeks or six months according to them. I use no such glasses; my eyes remain the same, and “everlasting” is “everlasting” to me whether I read of everlasting life or everlasting punishment. If I clip the word in one place I must do so in another, and it will never do to have a terminable heaven. I cannot afford to give it up *here* when its meaning is joyous to the saint, and therefore not *there* when its sound is terrible to the sinner. What, then, are “the everlasting arms”? They are arms which always were, and always will be: arms which always were strong, and never will grow faint or weary; arms which once outstretched will never be drawn back again; arms which once engaged for the defence of the chosen people shall never cease to work for their good world without end. Not failing arms, nor dying arms, but everlasting arms, are underneath the saints of God.

I understand the words to mean, first, the arms of *everlasting purpose*, “according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” His purpose may be called his arms, by which he stretches out his hands to do his work, and these can never fail: for “The Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?” “The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.” “He is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth even that he

doeth." We have to deal with One whose gifts and calling are without repentance. In the book of his purpose is it written, and his providence and grace shall tally with the secret decree, "He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he will have compassion on whom he will have compassion," and the everlasting purpose of sovereign grace shall be carried out to the end. O my soul, when thy poor purposes shift and vanish, and thou hast to change them twenty times a day, what a blessing it is to think that the purpose of thy God standeth fast, and he himself is without the shadow of a turning. He has declared that he that believeth in Christ shall be saved, and so thou shalt be, though all hell assail thee. Come what may, the eternal purpose lies at the bottom of all, and will be the end and result of all, and so all Israel shall be saved; for "underneath are the everlasting arms" of unchanging purpose.

But next we see here the arms everlasting of *love*. I do no violence to Scripture when I compare love to arms, for is it not written, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee"? Love has hands and arms with which it draws us, and these are at this moment underlying all the dealings of God with us. This love is everlasting love: without beginning, without variation, without end. Underneath thee, child of God, is the infinite affection of the omnipotent God; what, then, can harm thee? Thy love! Ah, how it flames forth at times, and then how dull it becomes; but thy safety comes from a love which never varies, which many waters cannot quench, and which the floods cannot drown. Look beneath thee, and thou mayest see a depth of love, fathomless and eternal, which may well remind thee of what Moses said when he spake of "the deep which lieth under." The strength of love which abides in God, who is love itself, no mind can conceive, but all this is placed under thee, O believer, for thy succour, support, and security. Immovable arches of immortal love sustain thy soul from fear of ruin. Rest thou there and sing unto the Lord thy song upon thy stringed instrument as long as thou hast any being.

But next, these arms may be described as the arms of *power*. And what saith Isaiah the prophet? "Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength." What said Jeremiah? "Ah Lord God! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee." Strength is needed to uphold the people of God lest they fall to their confusion, and that strength is always ready, nay, it is always in exercise. Believer, thou hast been able to stand because the arm of divine strength has never been withdrawn. He is able to keep thee from falling and to present thee faultless, and he will do it. "O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard: which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved."

These are the arms of *immutability*, for God abideth for ever the same. "I am God; I change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." He saved his people "with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, for his mercy endureth for ever." They are the arms of everlasting *blessing*, for God has determined to make his people happy, and happy they shall be. "Surely," saith he "in blessing I will bless thee." "Thy blessing is upon thy people." He giveth liberally unto them, and that liberality is never diminished, nor can it be stayed. Underneath thee, believer,

are the everlasting arms, for ever carrying thee as a nurse carries her child, for ever gathering up for thee innumerable blessings, and carrying them for thy provision. He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and with that same arm will he show strength unto his people. How blest are they who have such arms beneath them. I heard of a man who was spending a great deal of money, living in grand style, and launching out in business, and certain of his fellow tradesmen told me that they could not see a reason for his cutting such a figure. But said one, "There is somebody at his back; we are quite sure of that." And so it is with us: we may well be strong, we may well be happy, for there is a power unseen of men which is at our back: the everlasting arms are underneath us, and we cannot fail. Let us be joyous and confident, and praise the right hand of the Lord. Yea, though our conflicts should multiply let us not fear, but let us sing unto the Lord, "Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power. The right hand of the Lord is exalted. The right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly." For this right hand upholdeth the cause of his servants.

III. Now, in the third place, let us consider *WHEN* are the everlasting arms underneath us? The only answer is *now and for evermore*.

Now; at this moment, beloved, the everlasting arms are underneath us. The life of a Christian is described as walking by faith, and to my mind walking by faith is the most extraordinary miracle ever beheld beneath the sun. Walking on the waves, as Peter did, is a type of the life of every Christian. I have sometimes likened it to ascending an invisible staircase far up into the clouds. You cannot see a step before you, but you wind up towards the light. When you look downward all is dark, and before you lies nothing visible but cloud, while beneath you yawns a fathomless abyss. Yet we have climbed, some of us, now for years up this perpetually ascending stair, never seeing an inch before us. We have often paused almost in horror, and asked in wonder, "What next, and what next?" Yet what we thought was cloud has proved to be solid rock; darkness has been light before us, and slippery places have been safe. Every now and then, when the darkness has been denser than usual, a darkness which might be felt, when all the past behind us has vanished, and nothing has been seen but the one step we stood on, we have said, "How did I come here? What a strange, mysterious life mine has been!" We have almost wished ourselves down on the level among the worldlings, who can always see their way and know what is underneath them, but faith has come to our help again; we have believed, and believing we have seen the invisible and grasped the eternal; and then we have gone on, have put our foot down again, and anon have run up with joy the shining way. What an ascent we have sometimes made upon that ladder of light, so that we have companied with angels and left the world far down beneath our feet! Now and then we have enjoyed a glimpse through the thick darkness of the jewelled walls of the eternal city, which needeth no candle, neither light of the sun; we have seen, I say, its brightness, and determined still to climb the mysterious way. Well, believer, at this moment, though thou canst not see thy way, yet since thou art walking by faith "underneath are the everlasting arms."

It is so, though at this moment you fear that you are going down into a gloomy glen. You have lost a great deal of money lately, and the

friend who so kindly helped you is taken away, so that you are going down in the world : yes, but underneath are the everlasting arms. You are getting nearer to those arms now. Friends and wealth came between you and the almighty arms : but now you must lean on them alone. The creature fails, and you must rest on the Creator. You will have sweeter fellowship now than ever you had, since there is nothing to come between you and your Lord. "Ah," saith one, "but I am sinking in spirit; I am greatly depressed." Still underneath are the everlasting arms. Thy soul is sinking, like Peter amid the waves, but a hand is outstretched to save thee : thou canst not sink while thy heavenly Father's hand is near. Go on sinking, if the Lord so will it. Sometimes the greatest sweetness in life is found amid intense bitterness. I never have in my soul a more solid and real joy than when I have been cast into the dust with fearful depression of spirit. I stay myself upon my God, and him only, and then I touch the confines of bliss, though trembling all the while. I hardly know how to express the unrivalled sweetness of resting upon the Lord alone. When you are flung upon God altogether, then does your soul enter into the divinest peace. The natural spirits have gone, everything that sprang from the vigour of youth and the natural elasticity of the mind has departed : now you come right upon God, and lie naked in his hands ; and then there is cast into your cup a foretaste of heaven which the soul sits down and humbly sips to herself, for the secret she can never tell ; no ear would understand her if she did. "Underneath are the everlasting arms." And so, dear friends, if you should sink both in circumstances and in spirits, and your experience should happen to be a very downcast one, it will still be well. If now you have to discover the corruption of your nature, which you knew little of before ; if now your experience, instead of being that of the brethren of the higher life, should be one of humiliation, of prostration of spirit, of deep self-loathing, still underneath thee are the everlasting arms. If you are not to climb to Pisgah with Moses, but must dive to the bottom of the mountains like Jonah, still underneath are the everlasting arms, even at the lowest point of your going down.

So it shall be for ever and for ever, for the arms are everlasting in their position as well as their power. Now thou hast come to die ; thou hast gathered up thy feet in the bed ; the death sweat stands upon thy brow : thou art sinking so far as this life is concerned among the sons of men, but underneath thee shall then be the everlasting arms. Beautifully has Bunyan described confidence in death, when he pictures the pilgrims passing the river. Christian cried out to young Hopeful, "I sink in deep waters, the billows go over my head, all his waves go over me." Then said Hopeful, "Be of good cheer, my brother, I feel the bottom, and it is good." Thus, beloved, shall it be with you. You shall feel the bottom of death's chill river, but you shall say "it is good" ; for underneath are the everlasting arms. Then comes the last plunge, and we shall be as when a man stands on the edge of a precipice and leaps over into the clouds below him. You need not fear to take your last farewell and drop into your Father's arms, for underneath you shall be the everlasting arms ; and oh, how sweetly shall you be caught up together with the Lord in the air, pressed to the bosom of the great Father, and borne upward into the heaven of heavens, where you shall behold the face of

the Well Beloved, and find yourselves entranced in his company for ever and for ever. O heir of glory, underneath thee there is no hell: underneath thee there is no annihilation: underneath thee are the everlasting arms; therefore commit thy spirit unto thy faithful Creator, and then welcome life or death, for all is well with thee.

IV. Lastly, let us reply to the query, WHAT THEN? If underneath us are the everlasting arms, what then?

First, *let us look underneath*. My brother, you have been going on with great discomfort, sighing and crying because your way is rough, and because sometimes you think it dangerous, and fear that you will slip into a chasm and perish. Now, instead of complaining after this fashion, and fearing the road, stop a little and begin to examine—"What is underneath me? What is the bottom of my hope?" You hypocrites dare not examine; you formalists dare not search. You are afraid to ask questions and to open your eyes, lest you should see too much; but those who are honest and sincere in the way of our Lord are not afraid to be tested. You who are under any anxiety will do well to pull right up and say, "I have been troubled with doubts and fears, and I will no longer endure it. I will know the end of this; I will search myself and know my ways, and pray the Lord to let me see the worst of my case; for I long to know what there is underneath." If you are believing in Jesus Christ with a sincere heart, and resting in the atoning sacrifice, and the covenant of which his blood is the seal, you can afford to search underneath; for you will find all things solid and eternal. It is well to look underneath an outward providence when it frowns darkly upon you, for it conceals the eternal purpose of love. The sorrows which you see are but, as it were, a napkin hiding the precious treasure of eternal grace, hence you can say to yourself in all ill weathers, "All is well, for all is well underneath. The eternal purpose is working out my lasting good." Do not be afraid to search underneath, my trembling brothers and sisters; but when you do so and find the everlasting arms to be there, then sing unto the Lord with all your might.

The next inference is, if underneath us are the everlasting arms, *let us lean heavily*. We are afraid to lean too hard on God. To be careful not to encroach on a friend is a very proper disposition. Do not spoil a generous friend by drawing upon him so heavily that he will dread to see you again. I wish some people had a little more of that disposition, as far as I am concerned; but this is not a right feeling when you have to deal with the Lord. Never fear that you will weary your God; never say to yourself, "I will ask as little as I can." Why, he says, "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it." Never say "I will trust him a little, take him a part of my cares and rest a portion of my trials upon him." No, lean with your whole weight. Do not keep a spare ounce for your own carrying. That will break your back. Bring all the tons and the pounds and the ounces and the pennyweights, and cast them all on God. He loves his children to treat him with entire confidence. All your weight will not trouble him. You know Æsop's fable of the polite little gnat which apologised to the ox for burdening him when he alighted on his horn, and the ox replied that he really did not know he was there. Your God will not tell you that, for he counts the very hairs of your head, but he will tell you that your load is

no burden to him. Why, if you had fifty kingdoms burdening your brain and if you carried the politics of a hundred nations in your mind, or were loaded with all the cares of a thousand worlds, you might safely leave them with the Wonderful Counsellor and go your way rejoicing. Lean hard, brothers, lean hard, sisters, for underneath you are the everlasting arms.

The next thing is then, *let us rise confidently*. Do not be afraid of ascending to heights of love: do not be afraid of having a high ambition for a wholly consecrated life. Be not afraid of high doctrines, or high enjoyments, or high attainments in holiness. Go as high as you like, for underneath you are the everlasting arms. It would be dangerous to speculate, but it is safe to believe. Some men are always going downward, turning diamonds into gas and hallelujahs into howlings; they are trying to get rid of precious truth, and to substitute for it some new theory or the other. Let us be brave in the other direction, and seek to comprehend with all saints what are the heights and depths, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. You may climb, my dear young brother, nor fear to fall even if you reach the masthead of truth, for underneath are the everlasting arms.

Once more, *let us dare unhesitatingly*, and be very courageous for the Lord our God.

“Through floods or flames, if Jesus leads,
I'll follow where he goes,”

for underneath are the everlasting arms. Are you called upon to lose everything for Christ? Go on and leap like Curtius into the gulf for your Lord Jesus, for underneath you are the everlasting arms. Does your Master call you to an enterprise which seems impossible? Nevertheless, if God has called you to it, attempt it, for he rendereth to every man according to his work. Remember what the negro said: “If Massa Jesus say to me, ‘Sam, you jump through that brick wall,’ I jump. It is Sam’s business to jump: it is Massa’s work to make me go through the wall.” So it is with you. It is yours to leap forward when the captain gives the watchword, and in confidence to attempt what mere nature cannot achieve, for the supernatural is still with us. The best of all is, God is with us. Underneath us are the everlasting arms. Less reliance upon self and more reliance upon God; less counting of the barley loaves and fishes, and a greater readiness to bring them to his hands who can multiply them till they shall feed the thousands, this is what we want. God grant us grace to trust in his almighty power and sing henceforth and for ever “underneath are the everlasting arms.”

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Deuteronomy xxxiii.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—214, 731, 732.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

NO DIFFERENCE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, MAY 12TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

On this night the Tabernacle was free to all comers, the regular congregation having vacated their seats.

"He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."—Matthew vi. 45.

You see our Lord Jesus Christ's philosophy of nature. He believed in the immediate presence and working of God. As the great Son of God he had a very sensitive perception of the presence of his Father in all the scenes around him, and hence he calls the sun God's sun—"He maketh *his* sun to rise." He does not speak of the daybreak as a thing which happens of itself as a matter of course, but he traces the morning light to his Father, and declares, "*He maketh* his sun to rise." As for the rain, our great Lord and Master does not speak of the laws of condensation causing the vapour to become fluid and fall to the earth in a beneficial shower, but he says of his Father, "*He sendeth* rain upon the just and upon the unjust." Jesus knew far better than any of us all the laws by which the great Creator governs the world of matter, and yet he never speaks of these laws as though they operated without the divine power making them to be effective. In Christ's philosophy the Lord God himself was everywhere present, working all things, yea, even numbering the hairs upon the heads of his chosen, and marking the falling of a sparrow to the ground. Let such be your philosophy and mine, for it is the true one. Dr. Watts taught us to sing when we were children:

"My God, who makes the sun to know
His proper hour to rise,
And, to give light to all below,
Doth send him round the skies."

So our mothers taught us, and they taught us the truth; but the very wise men of this proudly enlightened age seem to be spinning all sorts
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of theories to get rid of God, to turn our benefactor out of his own world, and put man's best friend as far away as possible. I am sometimes reminded by these schools of philosophy and science of Tom Hood's "I remember, I remember." Here is a verse of it—

"I remember, I remember,
The fir-trees dark and high ;
I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky ;
It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm further off from heaven
Than when I was a boy."

It were a good thing for our sceptical teachers who have banished God out of his own universe if they could go back to their mothers' knees again and learn to talk simply and naturally after the fashion of the wisest man that ever lived, namely, our Lord and Master: then would they also confess that our heavenly Father "maketh his sun to rise and he sendeth the rain," for so it is. Laws of nature can do nothing without a power at the back of the laws. What is nature, about which many infidels speak so very plentifully? Ask them to tell you what nature is, and they will reply, "Why, it is nature." Well, but what is that? And they can only say, "Why nature you know, you know, you know, nature is nature." Some such sensible reply was given to certain of our friends on Kennington Common by one who was there reviling his Maker. Now if men did but understand nature they would know that nature is simply God's creation, workshop, laboratory, storehouse, and banqueting-hall. In nature what God has made and what God is doing, are made visible before our eyes. God is among us still, blessed be his name.

Believing this, we at once perceive that the Lord has been talking with us during the last few days very sweetly and delightfully. The merciful Father speaks to us with charming eloquence on such a day as this, of which George Herbert would have said—

"Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
The bridal of the earth and sky."

Coming just in the middle of this fair season of hope and promise, concerning which he sang—

"Sweet spring, full of sweet days and roses,
A box where sweets compacted lie,"

it has a still small voice which all should wish to hear. What a blessing to have enjoyed such a May-day as this has been. We have had God speaking to us according to the exact style of our text: he has made his sun to shine, and he has us sent rain. Our days for some little time have been made up of sunshine and shower, with every now and then that wondrous master-piece of glory in the sky which we call the rainbow, of which God has said, "I, even I, do set my bow in the cloud," "whose warp is the raindrop of earth, and whose woof is the sunbeam of heaven"; glorious ensign of his grace and faithfulness, who hung it on the cloud. Now what does God say to us in the sunshine

and the shower which thus come the one after the other in such pleasant alternation, making the grass so green and causing flowers to deck both tree and herb? What says he in all these? There is a voice full of the music of love, to which we shall do well to listen.

There is one instruction in it and only one that I shall be able to expound to-night. It is the fact brought out in the text, "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

One of the most considerable heights anywhere near London is Leith Hill, near Dorking. And if you have ever stood there, as I often have done with delight, you may, perhaps, have thought over our text. Far around you see the distant lands, pasture, arable, park, wood, with here and there the laughing water, and beyond the blue hills the distant sea. Up comes a gleam of sunlight, where all was cloud before. By-and-by the sun bursts out in full beauty. Do you notice how impartial it is? Men have mapped out the country: so far is allotted to this squire, so far to that, with here and there an insignificant patch pilfered from the wayside or the common which may belong to some industrious peasant; but the sun shines on all, glances into the hall, peeps into the cottage, gleams from the white spire of the church, and flashes from the tavern signboard swinging in the breeze, shines on the wayside, floods the green where the children are at play with its golden light; sweeps over all, in fact. Now that farm over yonder belongs to a churl, who is sure to rake his stubble after the harvest, lest the poor should glean an ear or two—a man who fights and quarrels with his neighbour; yet the sun shines on his selfish heritage. Yonder farm belongs to one who would, if he could, rob the orphan and fatherless and the widow—a heartless wretch, unworthy to gather a sour apple from the sharpest crab; yet the sun shines on his wheat and barley just the same as on that portion of land which belongs to the generous-hearted and the free, to the gracious and the godly. There is no distinction made between the meadows of the righteous and the pastures of the wicked. As you see the sunlight bathe the whole of the scene before you, the entire landscape smiles with universal joy. While you are watching, that cloud, which all day long you had suspected would turn to a shower, comes rushing up with the wind—the Great Father blowing with his breath this travelling fountain of the sky. Then it begins to pour. We seek the shelter of the lofty tower of Leith without a murmur, for we know that the rain is seasonable. The land wants it; it has been dry and parched for weeks. Down comes the blessed shower that shall fill our barns with plenty. Yes, yes, the Lord is pouring forth a shower of food-creating moisture, and, see, it is raining on the churl's piece of land just as much as on his liberal neighbour's. It is watering the farm of the man who would rob the fatherless of his shoes if the law permitted him; it is making his broad acres teem with plenty just as surely as it is fattening the poor man's patch, or falling upon the widow's scanty plot, or on the farm of the gracious godly man. As though he did not regard human character at all, God bids his sun shine on good and bad. As though he did not know that any men were vile, he bids the shower descend on just and unjust. Yet he does know, for he is no blind deity. He does know; and

he knows when his sun shines on yonder miser's acres that it is bringing forth a harvest for a churl. He does it deliberately. When the rain is falling yonder upon the oppressor's crops, he knows that the oppressor will be the richer for it, and means that he should be; he is doing nothing by mistake and nothing without a purpose. It is of his own will that he thus scatters sunlight with both his hands, and pour the bounteous shower on all things that grow. He knows what he is doing, blessed be his name. He on purpose sends forth shine and shower on the evil and on the good, and that is the one lesson we want to bring out to-night. What is the meaning of this boundless generosity? Why this impartial bounty, this indiscriminate liberality?

What does God say to us when he acts thus? I believe that he says this:—"This is the day of free grace; this is the time of mercy." The hour for judgment is not yet, when he will separate between the good and the bad; when he will mount the judgment seat and award different portions to the righteous and to the wicked. Sheep and goats as yet feed together, and he giveth to them all their fodder; wheat and tares grow in the same field and he ripens both for the harvest. This is not the day of justice, but the period of mercy—free rich mercy—mercy to the undeserving, grace to the worthless, sunlight of love for the evil, and showers of blessings for the unjust.

That is the teaching of the great Father to us to-night, and, in trying to bring it out, I shall first show *how forcible it is made to appear by its being placed as an example*; and secondly, *I shall dwell upon the act itself*, drawing inferences from the impartiality of sunshine and shower to encourage all who long to receive grace at the great Father's hand; and, lastly, I shall *let the plants and grass and trees talk to you a little*.

I. First, then, this which is spoken concerning God's causing his sunshine to fall on the evil as well as on the good is set before us as AN EXAMPLE, AND HENCE THE EMPHASIS OF ITS MEANING. We are, according to the verses which precede our text, to love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, to do good to them that hate us, to pray for them which despitefully use us and persecute us, because if we do so we shall be like our Father in heaven, who blesses with shine and shower the bad as well as the good. It must mean, then, that he, in causing his sun to shine upon the bad, is rendering good for evil, is wishing well to those who treat him ill, is intending favour to those that despitefully use him, and persecute his cause. That is what the text means. God would not command us to do what he will not do himself, if placed in similar circumstances. He bids us forgive, because his sunshine and shower teach us that he is ready to forgive. He bids us do good to those who do us ill, because in shine and shower he is doing good to those who hate him and despitefully use him. Now suppose, my brethren, that we were all enabled by divine grace to follow out the precept which is set before us, our conduct would be regarded by most men as being *very extraordinary*; for the most of people say, "Well, I will do good to a man if he is a deserving character, but you cannot expect me to help the undeserving. I will cheerfully render a measure of assistance to a person who is grateful, but to the ungrateful and the evil you do not expect me to be kind? Yes, I will be kind to my neighbour, but that man who the other day was so contemptuous in his behaviour as to treat

me worse than a dog, and seemed as if he would tread me under his feet like dirt; would you have me do him kindness?" Now, suppose that you are able to rise to the example which is put before you, and that you persistently do good, and only good even to the worst of men; and when you are treated with evil suppose you are able to do only the more good, and thus heap coals of fire upon the offender's head by being more generous to him than ever—that will be very extraordinary conduct. You think so, I know, for you feel the proposal to be too hard for flesh and blood to carry out; and so indeed it is. If, however, you are enabled to rise to so great a height, you will astonish all around you and become a wonder unto many.

Admire, then, with all your hearts the marvellous conduct of your God. He is prepared to put away all the offences of the past; and he is ready to forgive, and to do good to those who have been doing ill all their days; yea, to take into his very heart of love and make into his children the very persons who have hated him and spoken evil against him. Will it not be extraordinary if he does that to you, dear friend, if such has been your character? Know, then, that the Lord loves to do extraordinary things. "Who is a god like unto thee, passing by transgression, iniquity, and sin?" "As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts." God is prepared to save extraordinary sinners by an extraordinary act of love; wiping out the past, and causing them to begin a new life in which they shall be enriched with his favour and preserved by his love.

Again, if a man should carry out what I have tried to set forth—the continuous rendering of good to the undeserving—he would be regarded by all thinking persons whose judgment is worth taking to be *very noble*. When a man has been abused, misrepresented, and slandered, and he simply smiles and says, "If you knew me better you would not treat me so"; and if the first time he finds an opportunity he helps the man who injured him, and if he gets no gratitude, but, on the contrary, worse treatment than before, he is still able to persevere in doing good, most of you would say, "What a noble fellow he is." Even the man who does not praise him is obliged to feel his greatness. There is about such a man a superiority which covers him with honour in the consciences of those who observe his gentle spirit. Now, hearken, you that are conscious of great sin against God. If the Lord were to-night to put all your sins behind his back, and would take you into his family, as he took the poor returning prodigal; and make a great feast for you as he did when his son that was lost was found, would it not be noble of him? Would you not feel that his thoughts are far above your thoughts? Of course you would. Ay, but my God doth noble deeds such as make the harps of heaven ring with ecstatic music as the cherubim and seraphim behold his grace. O thrice noble God, there is none like unto thee, so ready to pardon and to receive each returning penitent and restore him to thy favour. To pardon you, my sinful brother, would be extraordinary and honourable to the last degree, but God is prepared to act after that noble fashion. Will you not accept such boundless love, and be at peace with such a Lord?

Do you not all feel that if you could act in so noble a style it would

be very *pleasurable* to you? No doubt, there is some pleasure in knocking a fellow down who insults you, but it cannot last long. When the fire of passion goes out a man begins to think whether it was a good thing to do after all: but not to do it, to turn the other cheek when you have been smitten, to do good instead of evil, have you ever tried that? If you have done so, you have heard music in your heart at midnight at the remembrance of your forbearance. When you have been lying awake you have thought it over, and you have said to yourself, "It makes me happy to think that I did not reply to that angry man in an angry tone—to think that I did not after all give him a smart blow when he gave me one; but that I showed patience and good temper, and endured ill treatment for Christ's sake." It is a pleasure as deep as it is noble. To be Christlike is to enjoy a heaven within your breast. Even so it is a pleasure to God to have mercy upon sinners: he delighteth in mercy. Nothing gives to God greater delight than to save those who have offended him. He is always ready for a gracious deed, and freely of his own will he meets those who seek his face; he does not want you to melt his heart with tears in order to win his love, and he does not require the laceration of your body by penance, nor a long period of agonizing doubt, before he grants full and effectual pardon. It is his joy to pardon. He meets returning sinners when they are yet a great way off, and kisses them. So rejoiced is he to receive them that if they are glad to be received, yet he is the gladder of the two. Joyous is the great Father's heart when he presses his Ephraims to his bosom.

Did I hear somebody say, "But this that you are talking about is not justice"? Listen: *it is not unjust*. Look at the conduct which our Lord commands us and see if that would be unjust. If a man has insulted me and I forgive him, am I unjust? If a man has slandered me, and I overlook it, am I unjust? If a man has done me an injury, and I refuse to take any revenge except that of doing good to him, am I unjust? Certainly I am not acting according to the laws of justice, but then I am not the judge, and not being the judge, why should I undertake an office to which I am not called? God is the judge of all by necessity of his nature, but he will not fully display that character till the day when in the person of his Son he shall come with all his holy angels to summon men to his bar: for the present he does not deal with living men after the rule of justice, but he deals with them according to his grace. If any one should question why he should give his grace to the undeserving, here is a sufficient answer for them: "May I not do as I will with my own? Is thine eye evil because mine is good?" If you choose to show kindness to those who do not deserve it, who shall say you "nay"? May not a man be as generous and forbearing as he pleases? What law, human or divine, forbids him? And if God, with infinite sovereignty of mercy, chooses to dispense his favours even to those who deserve nothing at his hands, let him be adored for ever, but let him not be questioned for so doing. At any rate it ill becomes the undeserving themselves to raise such a question; rather let them eagerly accept the bounty of the pardoning God.

And then note this thought—that to do good to the evil is, after all, *promotive of righteousness*. To be good to the unjust is to

help on the cause of right, for goodness to the evil is one of the most wooing things in the world, wooing them, I mean, to repent and do good in return. Let me give you an anecdote. There was a farmer who lived in one of the new settlements of America. We will call him Mr. Wrath, for he was a man of a horrible temper, and everybody who lived near him was made to know it. He had an excellent Christian man living near him—a gentle, good, easy-tempered soul; and on one occasion this good man's hogs strayed into the bad man's wheat and caused damage. Mr. Wrath came down in a tearing rage, and said what he would do and what he would not do; the other offered to pay for the damage, and said that he was very sorry for his neglect and would do his best that it should not happen again. However, it did happen again, and the owner of the wheat was in a great passion. He caught the swine and killed them all, put their bodies on a cart and took them back to his neighbour. "Your hogs," said he, "got into my corn: *here they are*"—and sure enough there they were, all dead. Of course, the owner of the hogs might have gone to law with Mr. Wrath and obtained damages at more or less cost of trouble and temper; but he merely said that he was exceedingly sorry that his hogs had transgressed again, and there ended the matter. Some time after it came to pass that Mr. Wrath's pigs went astray, as pigs will do, and they damaged this good man's wheat. What did he do? He had not sought a legal remedy against his adversary; would not it have been fair and straightforward to butcher Mr. Wrath's hogs, on the principle of tit for tat, as the proverb puts it? Of course it would have been, but a Christian does not act upon that worn-out legal principle. Instead of killing the creatures, he caught them all, tied their legs, put them on a cart, drove up to the door and said, "Friend Wrath, your hogs got into my corn: I have brought them to you: *here they are*,"—the very words that Mr. Wrath had used to him. He went to the cart, of course expecting to find his swine all dead; but there they were, all right enough, grunting in proof of their continued existence. "There," said he, "hogs are always troublesome. I dare say you could not help their getting into my corn: there they are." Mr. Wrath's temper was changed from that very day. How could he behave ill to such a neighbour who had vanquished him by forgiving him the injury that he had done him? Now, just as men can win upon men by their kindness, so does God win upon the hearts of men by his love when the Holy Spirit leads them to see and feel that he acts graciously towards them. There is no power to win a man like the power of love. If you have ever been converted, dear friends, I think that you have felt that you could say—

"I yield, by sovereign love subdued:
Who can resist its charms?"

The thunderbolts of God might have broken you down, but they could not have forced love into your terrified soul; yet, when Jesus came in love and mercy, you were compelled to yield, and that most gladly and heartily. So God's goodness to the unjust is aiding and assisting the cause of righteousness and justice, and who, therefore, shall say a word against it?

"Ah," says somebody, "but it is very *liable to be abused*. If you go

and help the bad, and benefit the unjust, you will find that they will take your charity and spend it wrongly, or perhaps they will turn again and rend you." This is very true, but still the Master says, "Love your enemies, and pray for them that despitefully use you." He does not insert a clause to the effect that we are only to do this where we are sure that it will not be abused. No, it is absolute. If they make bad use of it, that is no business of yours. Your heavenly Father knows that the churl, when he reaps his harvest, will simply spend it on himself; yet he sends him the sunlight and the shower. He knows that yonder oppressive wretch will, with his wealth, go on to grind the poor; but he sends his crops the warm, genial sun, and the refreshing rain, notwithstanding it. But, dear friends, there is this thing to be said about divine grace, that if God gives it to you, you cannot misuse it, for grace will change your heart and renew your nature, and if he is so ready to give to men those benefits which they can and do abuse, much more will he bestow that grace which is liable to no such ill usage.

Let me add, however, if anybody does abuse God's mercy, just as if any man abuses your practical kindness, *it involves him in great guilt*. Men cannot do despite to goodness without becoming exceeding vile. You will soon see this if I mention one anecdote. In Holland, in the days when the Baptists were persecuted, it happened that the canals were frozen over, and one poor despised Baptist escaped from a person who was seeking to drag him before the magistrates to get blood money for his head. He ran across the river, which was wide and frozen. The ice was strong enough to bear him and he got safely to the other shore. The person who was seeking his life was a heavier man and he slipped through the ice and went into the water. And what did this poor hunted Christian man do? He turned round and at the peril of his own life he helped his persecutor out and landed him on the bank; and what did the wretch do but seize him and drag him before the magistrates and he was burnt as the result of his own act of generosity. There is not a man in the world who does not feel that the wretch deserves universal execration. Everybody denounces him at once. So if after God's mercy to the unjust and the bad they still go on to sin against him I will leave the universal conscience of mankind to cry them down. I heard the other day an instance of a dog's returning good for evil, and this places the matter in an equally strong light. A man had taken a dog with the intention of drowning him,—a large Newfoundland dog. He went into a boat with a big stone intending to throw the dog out of the boat into the stream with the stone about his neck. Somehow or other before he had securely tied the stone, the dog had become free and in some little scuffle between them the boat was upset and dog and man were both in the water. The man sank and was nearly drowned; but the dog, noble creature, swam up and seized hold of the man and drew him safely to shore. Now suppose he had drowned the dog after that! Did I hear some indignant person say, "Let him be drowned himself." He would not deserve to live, surely. I would take such a dog as that home and say, "While I have a crust, there shall be a bit for you, good dog, who saved my life when I was destroying yours." Now, if even a dog when it renders good for evil gets a claim upon us, what shall I

say of the great God who with generous liberality continues to feed and keep in life and health the undeserving sons of men, and who more than this has given his own Son to die, and sent a message of amazing love to mankind, in which he says, "Come to me: I am ready to forgive you. Come and accept my love and mercy. Let us be friends, for I delight to forgive sin"? Is it not clear that to abuse such love is black-hearted baseness? I beseech you, be not guilty of it.

II. Now, secondly, we may gather fresh hope and encouragement from **THE FACT ITSELF**. When the sunlight comes upon a wicked man's field and the rain descends upon the farm of a blaspheming atheist, the man has done nothing to deserve either shower or sun, but yet they favour him. And, blessed be God, he gives his grace to those *who have done nothing to deserve it*. If all your life long you cannot think of one good action you have ever performed, nevertheless the grace of God is free to you if you will have it. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" is preached to you; for deservings and merits are out of the question. God gives freely even to the evil and the unjust.

Showers from heaven and sunlight come to those *who have not sought them* at the Lord's hands. That churl there never prayed for the sunlight. He does not believe in praying—not he. And that oppressor over yonder, that we spoke of, never asked God to send the rain: he said it was a matter of chance, and he did not see the good of praying about it. Yet it came. And oh, what a wonder it is that God is often found of them that sought him not! Persons have come into this Tabernacle, and the last thing they thought of was that they would be saved that night, and yet they have been. God's infinite mercy sometimes comes to those who do not ask for it: according to the text, "I am found of them that sought me not." Look at Colonel Gardiner. He had made an assignation, was about to perpetrate a gross act of vice, but the person whom he expected to meet had not come, and therefore he had to wait an hour or two; and while he waited he saw or thought he saw a vision of the Saviour who said to him, "I did all this for thee, what hast thou done for me?" That question with the sight of the Lord Jesus Christ, by divine grace, changed his heart: he never kept that assignation, but, as most of you know, he became one of the most devout Christians in the world. Oh, tell it the wide world over that as the rain tarrieth not for man nor waiteth for the sons of men, but cometh according to the good favour of God, so often does his grace visit those who knew not God and sought not after him. Let him be praised and extolled for ever and ever because of this.

Now, if grace sometimes comes to those who have not asked, do you not think that it will come to you who are asking for it? Oh you that are groaning for it, sighing for it, and longing for it, do you think it will be denied to you? God forbid! He will be sure to bless you. Believe in the Lord Jesus and it is yours at once.

The rain comes to those *who do not even acknowledge the existence of God*. It waters the atheist's fields, and refreshes the pastures of the fool who saith in his heart, "There is no God." Even so, I have known the grace of God descend on those who have loudly denied his very existence. In our church there is one at least who not long ago was a

loud spokesman against God, but upon his dropping into this house the word came with power to his soul, and again, and again, and again it described his case, till at last he said, "There is a God, for he has found me out. The preacher seems to know my case and character." Every time he came something was said which so accurately described himself that he could not understand and interpret it in any other way than that God had spoken to his soul. Now, if God calls by his effectual grace some that even doubt his existence, how much more will he look on you who have been made to tremble before him, and who desire to be reconciled to him? Surely he will hear the cry of the humble, and grant your penitent request.

The Lord sends the rain to some *that never thank him for it*. "A heavy shower, William," says the churl. "Yes, sir," says his pious servant, "God be thanked for it." "I do not know much about that, William. I dare say the wind had a good deal to do with it. I knew it would come, for the glass was down." So he ends that talk. Ay, but, dear friend, if God sends temporal blessings to those who do not thank him, will he not give his grace to those of you who feel that you would bless him for ever, if he would but save you? A good woman said when she sought the Lord, "If he saves me he shall never hear the last of it, for I will praise him as long as ever I live, and then to all eternity." Well, now you may reckon quite surely that when a soul feels after that manner the Lord will not deny it the sun of his love, or the rain of his grace. He gives rain even to those whom he knows will remain thankless, will he not give his Spirit to those who will become his grateful children?

Recollect, too, dear friends, that God gives this rain, and this sunshine, year after year. If I were very kind to a man, and he treated me unthankfully I should think that I had a good deal of grace if I kept on being kind to him for twelve months. And supposing I kept on seven years, I fancy that I should think that I had endured a long enough trial of him, and should get a little tired of being grieved by him; would not you? Yet, see, God has sent sunshine and shower upon the fields of the wicked all their lives long; he has continued to be kind to them, and yet he has not grown weary. Perhaps some of you are fifty years old and yet have never yielded to the love of God. Ah, you have been hearing sermons these fifty years. Perhaps you are getting on for seventy now. Why, you have heard tender words of love that went further than your ears, and touched your conscience, but you have still held out against God. Oh, the patience of God to have borne with you from day to day! Now, if he has suffered you so long, and if to-night you turn to him with purpose of heart, and say, "I have had enough of this rebellion. Lord, I would be at peace with thee," do you think that he will refuse you? Far from it, for his mercy endureth for ever.

One more remark only on this. The sunshine which you saw to-day, I do not doubt, was as bright a sunlight as that which Joshua saw when he bade the sun stand still; and the shower that fell the other day, especially as it fell in these quarters and at Brixton, I should say was quite as plentiful as any downpour which our grandsires can remember. It is evident that the sun's fire is not burnt out, and that the

clouds are not exhausted. Well, it is so in heavenly things, for there the eternal fulness dwells. God has as much love as ever, and as much grace as ever; and as a thousand years ago he poured forth his grace to convert the bad and the unjust, he is just as able to pour them out now upon the most guilty, and the most worthless. His grace in conversion, pardon, adoption, and preservation is as large as ever. Glory be to his blessed name, he still rains his bounties on the unjust; and that Christ who when we were dead in sins died for us, and who while we were yet sinners manifested his great love to us—that Christ who came into the world to save sinners—still aboundeth in power to save and bless; and if you will go to him (and oh may his grace constrain you) you shall find it to be so.

III. Lest I should weary you, I will finish with the last head, under which I should like to **MAKE THE EARTH, THE FLOWERS, AND THE TREES, WHICH HAVE BEEN WATERED AND WARMED, SPEAK TO YOU A LITTLE.**

And, first, I will suppose, dear friend, that you are here to-night, and feel that you cannot pray—feel as if you could not come to God, could not do anything. The flowers say, “We are cheered by the sun, and refreshed by the rain; we do nothing to deserve these blessings, *but we do long for them.*” The little flowers say, “We do long for the rain.” Look at them; they droop their heads during a long drought. See the grass, how brown it gets; see the leaves, how dry they are; see the earth, how chapped it is after a dry season. Now, soul, do long for the mercy of God; pine for it; sigh for it; cry for it. God help you to do that. To be forgiven, to get the love of God shed abroad in your hearts, is not that worth having? Do pant for it, I say, as the flowers sigh for the rain and the sun.

And next, the flowers seem to say, “*Do turn to it.*” If you keep a plant in your window see how it grows the way the sun comes. Notice the trees how they put out their branches sunward. See the sunflower how it turns its head in the direction of the sun. The flowers love the sun. If you cannot do anything to get divine grace, at least turn your head that way. Look that way; long that way; grow that way. You will receive it, it will not be denied. It will come to you. It *has* come to you if you already begin to turn to it with longing gaze.

And then the flowers seem to say, “*Drink it in when it does come.*” In January there was the crocus just peeping up from the soil, and the sun shone on it, and in gratitude it brought up from the deeps—from its cellar somewhere—a gold cup, and set it out to catch the sunbeams till the sun smiled and graciously filled it to the brim. And have you noticed when the soft April showers fall how the flowers seem each to have a cup to hold a share of heaven’s bounty? and certainly beneath the soil each flower has its little travelling rootlets sucking up each drop of moisture they can find.

Now, dear hearers, when grace does come specially near to you, drink it in. Is the sermon blest to you? Do not go away and lose its influence. Do you feel some tender movements in your conscience? Yield to them. Is there an invitation? Accept it. Is there a threatening? Tremble at it. Open your bosom and say “Come in, my Saviour, come in and reign and save my soul from the wrath to come.”

But then the flowers say once more, "*Do thank God for it.*" The last two or three days I have seemed to live in a temple. When I go into my garden I have a choir around me in the trees. They do not wear surplices, for their song is not artificial and official. Some of them are clothed in glossy black, but they sing like little angels; they sing the sun up, and wake me at break of day; and they warble on till the last red ray of the sun has departed, still singing out from bush and tree the praises of their God. And all the flowers—the primroses that are almost gone—these look into my heart deep meanings concerning God till the last one shuts his eye. And now the forget-me-nots and the wall-flowers and the lilacs and the guelder-roses and a host of sweet beauties are pouring out their incense of perfume, as if they said, "Thank the God that made us. Blessed be his name. The earth is full of his goodness."

Now, dear hearers, if you do get the Lord's grace, thank him for it. Grow by it, blossom with it, be fragrant with it. If you only receive a little grace be very grateful for it, for a little grace is worth a great deal. If God gives you grace enough to be called starlight, thank him for it, and he will give you moonlight; and when you get moonlight grace, thank him for it, and he will give you sunlight; and when you have obtained sunlight grace, thank him for it, and he will give you the light of heaven which is as the light of seven days.

Lastly,—and this the flowers cannot teach you, because the flowers cannot do it—*pray for grace*. It will come; it will come. Do you remember George Herbert's pretty verse. With that I will finish. He says:—

"The dew doth every morning fall:
And shall the dew outstrip thy dove?
The dew for which grass cannot call—
Drops from above."

See his point? The dew comes every morning. The grass cannot ask for it, but it comes. And shall the dew be more free and swift than the Holy Ghost. No, saith the poet: I can pray for that holy Dove: will he not come to me who pray, since the dew comes to the grass which cannot call for it? Behold he visits the earth and waters it with the river of God which is full of water, and flings back the curtains of the sky and bids the sun shine out with genial face upon the poor dead soil; and if he does all this for the fields that cannot pray and for flowers that cannot speak, how much more will he do it for you who seek his face through Jesus Christ.

Come then to him. He will gladly welcome you. Come and trust his Son. Come and rest in the merit of Jesus' blood, and you shall find eternal life. May God bless you all, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew v. 17—48;
vi. 1—8.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—176, 555, 549, 1051.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

GREAT DIFFERENCE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 19TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Where is the God of judgment?"—Malachi ii. 17.

"Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not."—Malachi iii. 18.

You were not here, I am thankful to say, last Sabbath evening, for it was your duty and privilege to stay away to give others an opportunity of hearing; but my subject then was our heavenly Father, who maketh his sun to rise upon the evil and upon the good, and sendeth rain upon the just and upon the unjust. Then I set forth the universal benevolence of God and the way in which he stays the operations of justice to give space for forbearance and longsuffering. Now this fact, this gracious fact, which ought to lead man to repentance, has through the perversity of human nature been used for quite another purpose. Men have said, "He blesses the evil as well as the good. The sun shines on all alike; the rain indiscriminately enriches the field of the churl and the pasture of the generous heart; where is the God of judgment? Is there such a God? Is it not one and the same whether we fear him or disregard him?"

Side by side with this has run another circumstance perhaps even more readily misunderstood. God is in this life preparing his people for a better world and part of that process is effected by trial and affliction, so that it frequently happens that the godly are in adversity while the wicked are in prosperity. Having no such designs toward them as toward his people, the Lord permits the wicked to enjoy themselves while they may; so that oftentimes they are as bullocks fattened in rich pastures, but they forget that they are fattened for the slaughter; while the righteous are brought very low, are often in poverty, frequently in sickness, and not seldom in despondency of spirit, but all to prepare them for the glory land. From the trials of the godly, which are all sent in wisdom and in love, shortsighted man has inferred that God has no regard to human character and even treats those worst who serve him best. In Malachi's days the blaspheming crew even said that God takes sides with

the wicked, and they wearied God by saying—"Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them." Then again they uttered the old rude but plain-spoken question, "Where is the God of judgment?"

Truly brethren, in looking with these poor eyes upon the affairs around us they do appear to be a great tangle and snarl, a mixed medley of strange accidents. We see the true princes of the earth walking in the dust and beggars riding upon horses. We mourn as we see servants of God and heirs of heaven lying, like Lazarus, sick at the gate of the ungodly miser, while the vicious libertine is rioting in luxury and drinking full bowls of pleasure. Until we perceive the clue, providence is a labyrinth into whose centre we can never penetrate. But there is a clue which opens all its secrets. There is a God of judgment, not sitting in heaven in blind indifference, but looking down upon the sons of men and working out purposes of righteousness at all times.

At this time I purpose to speak upon the fact that God doth put a difference between the righteous and the wicked, and makes no mistake between Egypt and Israel. The Lord knoweth them that are his, and in his dealings, which we cannot always understand, he nevertheless hath not confounded his people with the world, nor doth the rod of the wicked rest upon the lot of the righteous. He hath a right hand of acceptance for them that fear him, he hath a left hand of punishment for those that fear him not. This distinction is not so apparent yet as it shall be, but we shall now trace the gradual widening of the division between the two classes, and show that still there is a God of judgment, and that by-and-by even the blindest eye shall be able to discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.

I. First, then, THERE ARE SIGNS OF SEPARATION between the righteous and the wicked.

The first sign is seen in the evident difference of *character*. "They that feared the Lord" are spoken of. That is to say, there are still some on the face of the earth who believe that there is a God, who believe in the revelation which he has given, who accept the atonement which he has provided, and who delight to be obedient to the will which he has declared. How came they to fear the Lord? The answer is, it is a gift of his grace and a work of his Spirit wherever it is found. It makes a distinction very deep, and very vital, and consequently very lasting, for it shall continue throughout eternity. Let us bless God that in the worst times he still hath a remnant according to the election of grace, and when blasphemers grow bold in sin and say "Where is the God of judgment?" there are at least a few hidden ones who nevertheless look up and behold the Lord exalted above the rage of his foes. There will always be a band who bow the knee and worship the Most High, because their hearts stand in awe of him. God is beginning to separate his chosen from the world, when he gives them an inward sense of his presence, and a consequent holy fear and sacred awe of him. The dividing work begins here, in the bent and current of the heart.

This difference in real character soon shows itself in a remarkable change of *thought* and meditation. According to the passage before us, those who are said to "fear the Lord," are also described as those who

"thought upon his name." Their thoughts are not always towards the transient things of this world, but they are much engaged with the eternal God and his truth : they are not always grovelling after the creature, but soaring towards the Creator. The Hebrew word has the idea of "*counting*": they reckon the Lord as the chief consideration when they count up their arguments for action. Others do not take him into the reckoning, they act as if there were no God at all : but the righteous make much of him, and account him to be the greatest factor in all their calculations ; they fall back upon God in trouble, and joy most of all in him when they are glad. They reckon not without the Lord of hosts ; they say "The best of all is, God is with us." And concerning any action, if it be contrary to his mind, they reject it ; if it be according to his will they think upon him, and they delight to carry it out. This makes a great difference in their course of life, and also in their happiness. Dear hearers, I trust there are many among you who can truly say that your meditation of God has been very sweet, you have been glad in the Lord. This, then, is working out a distinction between you and the wicked who forget God. You fear the Lord, and you take delight in meditating upon him in secret, but this the worldling cannot understand.

This makes a distinction between you and the careless, which does not long exist without operating in a further direction : you grow weary of their frivolous conversation, and they cannot endure your serious observations, and so two parties are formed, as of old there were two lines—the sons of God and the children of Cain. You will soon see Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob living over again if you watch the thoughtless worldling and the pious Christian, and mark how much they differ. Hence there grows out of this difference of thought and feeling a separation as to *society*. "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another," which shows that they often met, and that they delighted in one another's company. Each man felt himself feeble in the midst of the ungodly, and therefore he sought out a brother that he might be strengthened by association. Each man felt himself to be like a sheep in the midst of wolves, but knowing the nature of sheep to be gregarious, each one sought to his fellow, that they might make up a flock, hoping that, as a flock, they might gather round the Good Shepherd. Yes, and in the ungodliest times there are not only gracious people here and there, but these chosen souls by some means or other make mutual discoveries, and come together and so form the visible church of the living God. In Rome in the days of the Cæsars, when to be a Christian meant to be condemned to die without mercy, if believers could not meet in their houses they would meet in the abodes of the dead, in the Catacombs : but they must meet. It is the nature of God's children that they do not like going to heaven alone, but prefer to go up to the temple in bands and companies, and the more the merrier, as the proverb hath it, for they delight to go with the multitude that keep holy day, and they rejoice to fly in flocks like doves to their windows. There is a divine sweetness in Christian communion, and every true saint delights in it. The essence of our religion is love, and he that loveth not the brethren loveth not God, and lacks an essential point of the Christian character. By the exercise of holy brotherhood the Lord continues to call out his own people, and thus to create a manifest separation. Likeness of character and thought produce a mutual

attractiveness, and so a corporate body is formed, and the solitary secret ones become manifest in the mass. The chosen stones are quarried, and are builded into the similitude of a palace; what if I say that they come together bone to his bone to fashion the spiritual body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This distinct association leads on to a peculiar *occupation*: for "they that feared the Lord *spake* often one to another." They heard others speak against the Lord, and they resolved to speak too. Of others the Lord complained, "your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord," and these men felt that it would be a shame if *they* were silent. They did not cast their pearls before swine, yet they wore their pearls where those who were not swine, but saints, could see them. In society where truth would be appreciated they were not backward to declare it: "they *spake* often one to another." It was a time of noise and tumult, it was a time of speaking very bitterly against the Lord: therefore when they met together they *spake* for the Lord, and each one opened his mouth, that the Lord might not lack for witnesses. I take it that the expression means that they renewed and *repeated their testimony*. "They *spake* often one to another." They said, "Ah, we can answer what the ungodly are saying, our experience testifies that they speak not aright. It is not a vain thing to serve God. How do you find it, brother?" Then the brother would say, "I find it exceedingly comforting and cheering to my soul. They have said, What profit is it that we have kept his ordinances? but I have found it exceeding profitable, for in keeping his commandments, there is great reward." Then a third would say, "It has enriched our souls to walk according to the mind of God, and in the blessed ordinances of his house our souls have been fed and exceedingly nourished." A fourth would add, "The ungodly say it is in vain that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts: do you find it so, brother?" The reply would be, "No, my mournful days have often been most profitable, like the days of shower and cloud, which have most to do with the harvest." "Besides," said another, "we do not walk mournfully before the Lord as a rule, for we rejoice before him, yea, in his name we do exceedingly rejoice." Thus, you see, by their testimony the one to the other they supported each other's minds against the popular infidelities of the time; they set their thoughtful experience against the vicious falsehoods of unbelieving men, and so they both honoured God and benefited each other.

When they "*spake* often one to another" I have no doubt they *expressed their affection* one for the other. They said, "Let us not marvel if the world hate us: did not our Master say, It hated me before it hated you"? Did he not tell us to beware of man; did he not remind us that our worst enemies should be those of our own household. "Yea, brethren," they would say one to another, "let us love one another, for love is of God." The elders would speak like John the divine and say, "Little children, love one another," and the younger ones would respond by acts and words of loving respect to the older saints. Their mutual expressions of love would increase love. As when we lay live coals together they burn the better, so loving intercommunications increase the heat of affection till it glows like coals of juniper, which have a most vehement flame.

No doubt, for we know by what we see, this speaking one to another *assisted each other's faith*. One might be weak, but they were not all weak at once; one and another would be strong just then. We all have our ups and downs, but the mercy is that when one is sinking another is rising. It will frequently happen that if the sun does not shine on my side of the hedge it is shining on yours, and you can tell me that the sun is not snuffed out, but that it will shine on me too by-and-by. Commerce makes nations rich, and Christian intercourse makes believers grow in grace. Speaking often one to another with the view of helping the weak hands and confirming the feeble knees, is a means of great blessing to the souls of Christians. When they met, one would tell what he knew which his brother might not know, and a third would say, "I can confirm that statement and add something more," and so the first speaker would learn as well as teach. Then a fourth brother would say, "But there is yet another truth which stands in relation to that which you have stated, do not overlook it." Thus by communion in experience, and each one expressing what the Lord had written upon his heart, the whole would be edified in righteousness.

Now, beloved, it is in proportion as the children of God speak often one to another in this way that the church is brought out into a visible condition. A silent church might grope through the world unobserved, but a speaking church, speaking often within itself, is of necessity soon heard beyond the doors of the house in which it dwells. Soon does the sound of gospel music steal over hill and dale. "Their sound hath gone forth throughout all the earth, and their words unto the end of the world." The speaking together of assembled saints at Pentecost led to the gift of tongues, and then they spoke so that every man in his own language heard the wonderful works of the Lord. An increase of private communion among the saints would lead to a fuller public communication to the outside, and the world would receive a blessing.

Thus I have shown you that the Lord thus gradually begins to separate a people to himself. The fear of the Lord in the heart, and the thought of God in the mind lead to association in persons of similar mould: hence arises the church. Then the interchange of expression between the godly makes them zealous, and this leads to public testimony, and the people of God are revealed. You will say, that this does not prove that God is dealing differently with them from other men. "Where is the God of judgment?" is the question, and how is it to be answered? My reply is, but in all this the Lord is putting a difference. To work his fear in the heart is an act of sovereign grace, but to enable the soul to find deep enjoyment in meditating upon divine things, is a reward as well as a gift of grace, and a reward more valuable than if he gave the God-fearing man wealth and fame. Christian society is also no small token of the divine favour, and is another reward of the God-fearing. I do not know how you find it, but I can truly assert that my choicest delights are with the people of God. What a deal some of us owe to Christian fellowship! People whom we should never have known and never have thought of speaking to are now our choicest friends, and have been and are incalculably helpful to us. Christian love has enlarged our family circle wonderfully. We have come to be intertwined the one with the other, and the separate threads have ceased to be such, for they have

become a threefold cord which cannot be broken, and this is no small gift of divine grace. Moreover, the communications which have arisen out of this society, in which we have edified one another, have they not been very precious to us? Can you not say you had rather dwell for a day in the courts of the Lord than reign in the tents of wickedness for ages? Is it not so that when we are able to rejoice together, and tell out our experience we find a pleasure which makes the wilderness and the solitary place to be glad? Best of all, it is in the midst of these communications, where holy society yields us gracious fellowship, that God himself is found. This is the grand distinction in God's relation to the universe at this present time, that he is with his people, and they know it; while he is far from the wicked. The Lord hearkened and heard of old, and he hearkens and hears still; and the Lord answers out of his holy place the prayers of his children, and sends tokens of acceptance to those who praise and magnify his name. "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge." Oh come, let us exult before him, for he is not far away, nor has he hidden his face from us, but he dwelleth between the cherubim and shineth forth among his saints in the person of his dear Son, and manifests himself to us as he doth not to the world. Even now Israel in Egypt is not Egypt, for God is pitying the sighs and cries of his people. Israel in the Arabian desert is not Arabian, for, lo, the fiery cloudy pillar, like an uplifted standard, gathers around it a separated people. Lo, "The people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." Even now the faithful in going out from the world and being separate find the promise fulfilled: "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." There is the first answer to the question, "Where is the God of judgment?" The separation is already beginning; there are signs of it now.

II. Secondly, THERE ARE PREPARATIONS FOR A FINAL SEPARATION, and these are at this moment proceeding. What these preparations are we learn from the sixteenth verse—"The Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." There is a day coming in which he will separate the two sorts of men the one from the other, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats. The great net is now dragging the sea-bottom: the day comes when the net shall be hauled in, and drawn to shore. What a medley it contains of good and bad fish, of creeping things, and weeds, and shells, and stones: this mass must be parted. Then will come the putting of the good into vessels and the casting of the bad away. When that is done it will be executed with great solemnity and care. There will be great discrimination used in the dividing of the righteous from the wicked, and as at a trial *everything proceeds upon evidence*, the separating work is being prepared for us every day, because the evidence is being collected and recorded. The evidence in favour of the righteous might be forgotten if it were not duly preserved, in order that in the day when the separation shall be consummated there may be no mistake, and nobody may be able to challenge the decision of the great Judge.

Recollect this, dear friends, that *evidence is being written down in a book—evidence of fidelity to God* in evil times. When others were thinking

against God, and speaking against God, there were some who spoke on his behalf, because they feared him, and thought upon his name, and their singular conduct was reported upon and chronicled. God's gracious eye never overlooks one single act of decision for him in the midst of blasphemy and rebuke. If the timid girl in the midst of a Christless family still patiently endures reproach, and holds on to her Master's truth, though she cannot speak eloquently, behold it is written in the book. Though her tears may often be her strongest expressions, they are in the book also, and shall not be forgotten. When the workman in the shop speaks a word against filthy language, a word for the sacredness of the Sabbath, a word for his Lord, it is all written in the book of remembrance. A commission is instituted for the collection of evidence as to those that fear the Lord, and think upon his name. Are you, dear friends, furnishing evidence, do you think, evidence which will prove that you are truly godly? Do you clearly stand out from among your fellows, and are you manifestly separate, so that even Satan himself at the last great day will not be able to challenge the evidence that will be given, that you did indeed fear the Lord when others reviled him?

This evidence is being taken by the Lord himself. There is much consolation in this, because others might be prejudiced, and give an unfavourable view of what we do, but when the Lord himself bears witness the truth will be manifested. "The Lord hearkened and heard." It is a very strong expression; he not only "hearkened" as one trying to hear, but he did actually hear all that was said. What a witness God will be in favour of his saints! If we really fear him and think upon his name he will set our holy fear, and our godly thought, and our gracious talk in evidence on our behalf. He reads our motives, and these are a deep and vital part of character. Others might err, but he cannot: what he hears is accurately heard and correctly understood. Evidence is being collected, then, by a witness who is truth itself.

This evidence is before God's eye at all times. If you notice, "the book of remembrance was written before him," as if while every item was being put down, the book lay open before his gaze. From him the record is no more concealed than the act itself: past deeds of virtue are present to his eye. Every recorded act of grace is especially noticed by the Lord, every separate word of faithfulness and act of true God-fearing life is noted, weighed, estimated, valued, and safely preserved in memory to justify the verdict of the last grand dividing day. Do think of it, then, beloved—all that divine grace is working in you of humble faithfulness to God is being recorded. No annual report will proclaim it, it will never be printed in the magazine, nor advertised through the newspapers so as to bring you renown; but a book of remembrance is written before the Lord himself. There it lies before him whose single approval is more than fame. There, read a page—"Such an one thought upon my name; So-and-so spoke to his brother concerning me, and helped to the mutual edification of the body and to the bearing of powerful testimony for the truth against the assaults of error."

This evidence, moreover, dear friends, is of a spiritual kind; and this is one reason why it is taken down by God and by no one else, for it is evidence concerning the state of the heart in reference to God, and who is to form that estimate, but the Lord who searches the heart. Who is to know the

thoughts of the mind, save God alone? There is an ear that hears thought: though it is not indicated by a sound so loud as the tick of a clock, nor so audible as the chirping of a little bird, yet every thought is vocal to the mind of the Most High, and it is written down in the remembrance book. Certain great actions which every man applauds may never go into that book, because they were done from motives of ostentation; but the thought which nobody could have known, and which must otherwise have remained in oblivion, is recorded of the Lord, and shall be published at the last assize. Perhaps it ran thus, "What can I do for Jesus? How can I help his poor people? How can I cheer such and such a languishing spirit? How can I defeat error? How can I win a wandering soul for my Master?" Such thoughts as these are reckoned worthy of record and they are supplying evidence which in his gracious love the Lord is collecting, that the sentence of his great tribunal may be justified to all.

That evidence concerns apparently little things, for it mentions that "they spake one to another." Of course people will gossip when they get together: what is there in talk? Oh, but what sort of gossip was it? that is the question. For a holy theme turns gossip into heavenly fellowship. It is written, they "thought upon his name." Surely it is not much to think. Ah brethren, thinking and speaking are two very powerful forces in the world, and out of them the greatest actions are hatched. Thoughts and words are the seeds of far-reaching deeds, and God takes care of these embryos and germs: men do not even know of them and if they did know would not esteem them, but they are put down in the book of remembrance which lies always open before the Most High.

Now, all this is going on every day and every night as certainly as time's sands drop through the hour-glass. Letter after letter, and stroke by stroke, the story is being written in the book of remembrance, and though men see it not the evidence is being gathered up to be used in that dread solemnity, in which, amidst the pomp of angels, the great Infallible shall separate the blessed of his Father from those who are accursed. Thus every day the God of judgment is working towards the time when even the most careless shall discern between the righteous and the wicked.

III. This brings us to the third point that **IN THAT SEPARATION GREAT PRINCIPLES WILL BE MANIFESTED**. I shall only have time to mention them rapidly.

First, the principle of *election* will be displayed. God will have a people who are more his than other men can be. "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day." "All souls are mine," saith God, and his witness is true, but he rejects some souls because of sin, and says, "Ye are not my people." As for his chosen, they are his portion, his peculiar treasure, his regalia, his crown jewels, and they shall be his for ever. Then will special love and peculiar choice be manifest, for in the day of the separation it shall be seen that the Lord knoweth them that are his and while he counteth others to be as mere stones of the field he hath set his heart upon the saints who are the gems of his crown.

But then will come as the next principle the fact of *essential value*: namely, that the Lord's people are not only his, but they are his *jewels*.

There is something in them which grace has put there, which makes them to be more precious than other men. "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour": God's grace makes his children to be purer, holier, heavenlier than the rest of mankind; and they are rightly divided from the impure and worthless mass. They will at the last by evidence be proved to have been jewels among men, and nobody shall be able to question their worth. They shall be confessed by all men to have been precious stones amid pebbles, gold amid dross.

Then will come up the next principle of *open acknowledgment*. They were the Lord's, and they shall be owned as such. "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day." He himself will declare the fact, for it is written, "He is not ashamed to call them brethren," and in that day the Lord Jesus will say, "Here am I, and the children that thou hast given me." Oh, what a joy it will be to be thus openly confessed by Jesus himself! Now, we are unknown if we be God's people, for the world knoweth us not because it knew not our Master himself; for we are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God; but when he who is our life shall appear then shall we also appear with him in glory. "Then shall thy righteousness shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Then shall be carried out the principle that there is nothing hid which shall not be known; and those who were secretly servants of the Lord shall have evidence of that fact read aloud before assembled worlds, and God, the judge of all, shall not be ashamed to declare, "They are mine, they are my peculiar treasure."

But even in their case the principle of *mercy* will be conspicuous. I want you to notice very specially. "When I make up my jewels they shall be mine, and I will spare them." Sparing applies to those who under another mode of judgment would not escape. Had it been a question of merit as under law, they would have been doomed as well as others, but the Lord saith, "I will spare them." O God, even though thou hast made thy chosen to be thy treasure, yet thou dost spare them, for the evidence does not prove them meritorious, but shows that they were saved in Christ Jesus, and therefore taught to fear thee. When the apostle had received great kindness from a friend whom he had valued he offered a prayer for him, which you may be sure would be a very earnest and comprehensive one, but it was this: "The Lord have mercy upon him in that day." That is all we can expect, and, blessed be God, it is all we need. The matter of justice is settled by our Great Substitute, and to us mercy comes freely. The brightest saint that ever reflected the image of Christ on earth will have to be saved by mercy from first to last. "I will spare them," saith he, for he might have dealt otherwise with them had he taken them on grounds of law, and judged them apart from the mercy which flows through the atoning sacrifice. True, they were jewels, and they were the Lord's own treasure, but if he had laid up their sins in evidence instead of their marks of grace, if that book of remembrance which is written before him had contained an account of their shortcomings and their transgressions as the basis of judgment, it would have gone otherwise with them, but now he calls to remembrance their godly fear, their sacred thoughts; and their holy conversation, and therefore he spares them.

They will be dealt with on the principle of *relationship* also. "I will

spare them as a man spareth his own that serveth him." You spare your son when you know he is doing his best to serve you. He has made a blunder, and if he had been a mere hired servant you might have been angry, but you say, "Ah, I know my boy was doing all he could, and he will do better soon, and therefore I cannot be severe. I see that he is imperfect, but I see equally well that he loves me, and acts like a loving son." The word here used signifies pity or compassion, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." He will even at the last look upon us with a love which has pity mingled with it, for we shall need it in that day. He will "remember that we are dust," and will accept us, though, cognizant of all the faults there were, and of all the infirmities that there had been : he will accept us still, because we are his own sons in Christ Jesus, and by grace desire to serve him. We do not serve him to become sons, but because we are sons. It is a sweet name for a child of God : a son-servant, one who is a servant to his father, and therefore, because he is his son, serves not for wage, nor of compulsion, but out of love. Such service is mentioned as evidence of sonship, and not as a claim ; and we shall be saved through grace, our holy service of sonship being the proof of that grace.

Beloved, on these principles will God make the final division. He will say "You are mine : I chose you. You are my saints, and there is a gracious excellence in you. I acknowledge you as mine, and I am not ashamed to do so, for you bear my nature. I chose you in mercy, and in consequence of my having chosen you, I have made you to be my son-servants, and so I accept your holy conversation as the token of your sincere love to me, and I receive you into my glory to be mine for ever and ever.

IV. And now, lastly, comes the sure truth that THE SEPARATION ITSELF WILL BE CLEAR TO ALL. Then shall ye mourn ye sorcerers and adulterers, ye that oppress the hireling and turn aside the stranger from his right, ye false swearers and enemies of God. You now can go on your way and say, "God cares nothing about righteous or wicked, he deals with all alike, or even smites his children worst of all ;" but ye shall look another way by-and-by. Compelled to turn your heads in another direction from that of this poor fleeting world, you shall see something that will astound you ; for though you wish it not, even you and much more the godly shall then "discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not."

The division will be sharp and decisive. Wherever you read in the Bible you find only two classes ; you never read of three ; but you find the righteous and the wicked, him that feareth God and him that feareth him not. A certain order of persons puzzle us in making division here below, because we do not know to which party they belong ; but when the book of remembrance is finished and shall be opened, there will be no sort of difficulty in knowing them ; the two classes shall roll apart like the two portions of the Red Sea when Moses lifted up his rod, and there shall be a space between. On which side, my dear hearer, you that are halting between two opinions,—on which side will you be ? There will be no border land, no space for non-committal and neutrality ; you will then be among the fearers of God or among those that fear not his name. Who may abide the day of his coming ? That coming may be very

speedy, for none of us knoweth the day nor the hour when the Son of man shall appear. The separation will be sharp and decisive, there will be no undecided ones left.

And it will obliterate a host of pretensions, for the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud shall be as stubble. The Pharisee who thought he took his place among those that were the jewels of creation, will find that the coming of the Lord will burn up his phylacteries, and his broad hems, and utterly consume all his boasting as to fasting thrice in the week, and taking mint and anise and cummin, for these things were never written in the book, nor worth recording there. What was put there was fearing the Lord, and thinking upon his name, and speaking one to another; but ceremonials and niceties of observance are not thought worth a stroke of the recording pen. There is nothing in the book to act as evidence for the proud, but everything to condemn him; and therefore the day shall burn him up and utterly consume him and his hopes.

That division will be *universal*, for all they that do wickedly shall be as stubble, not one of them escaping. Though they hid their wickedness and bore a good name, though they concealed their sin even from those who watched them, they entered the church and gained honours in it, as Judas did in the college of the apostles; yet that day shall discover all that do wickedly. Talk how they may, and speak as they please, their outward conduct will be the index of their inner alienation from God, and in the hour of their judgment the fire shall consume them from off the earth.

Then shall both classes perceive that the distinction *involves two very different fates*. Once the righteous were in the fire, and according to the third chapter and the third verse, the Lord sat as a refiner and purified them in a furnace like silver, but now the tables are turned, and the proud, and they that do wickedly, are in a more terrible fire. The day shall burn as an oven! The righteous were profited by their fire, for they were good metal, and to part with the dross was no loss, but the wicked are such base metal that they shall utterly fail in the testing fire. The tables will be turned again, for the righteous were under the feet of the wicked, they ridiculed and mocked them, and called them "cants and hypocrites"; but then the ungodly shall be laid low, and the righteous shall tread them as ashes under their feet. The cause of evil will be a worn out thing, it will be burnt up, and there will be nothing left of it upon the earth but memories of its former power, and of the fire by which it perished. That day cometh, and let the mighty ones amongst the sons of men who rebel against God know it: they shall no more be able to resist the terror of his presence than the stubble is able to stand against the blazing fire. When they pine for ever in the place where their worm dieth not and their fire is not quenched they will know the God of judgment, and see how utterly he consumed them out of the land.

Look at the lot of the righteous. When Christ the Sun of Righteousness shall arise upon the earth and gild it with his own light there shall be a new heaven and a new earth, and the righteous shall go forth and leap for joy, like cattle which aforetime had been penned in the stall. No works of the ungodly shall be left. As far as this world is concerned they shall be utterly and altogether gone. There shall then be no tavern

songs or ale-house ribaldry; there shall be no village profligate around whom shall gather the youth of the hamlet to be led away by his libidinous and blasphemous words: there shall then be no shameless reviler who shall provide a hall where blasphemers may congregate to try which can utter the blackest profanities against the Lord of hosts. There shall be no shrine of virgin, or of saint, or idol, or image, or crucifix. Superstition shall be swept away. There shall be no congregations where pretended preachers of the gospel shall deal out new philosophies and suggest newly invented scepticisms, or which at least they hoped men would accept as new, though they were the old errors of the past picked from off the dunghill upon which they had been thrown by disgusted ages. Sin shall all be gone and not a trace of it shall be left, but here shall dwell righteousness and peace; the meek shall inherit the earth, and the saints shall stand each one in his lot, for the Lord himself shall reign amongst his ancients gloriously. From every hill and every vale shall come up the one song of glory unto the Most High and every heart that beats shall magnify his name, who at last has answered the question, "Where is the God of judgment?" Then, cast into the nethermost hell, in the place appointed for the devil and his angels, the ungodly shall never ask again "Where is the God of judgment?" and saints triumphant in their Lord with whom they shall reign for ever in eternity, shall also perceive that he "discerneth between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not." Beloved hearer, where—O where will *you* be? Where shall I be?—in that day?

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Malachi ii. 17, iii. 18

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THE FAITHFUL SAYING.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 26TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."—1 Timothy i. 15.

It is worthy of notice that Paul, in the passage before us, as indeed in all his writings, exhibits great sensitiveness with regard to sin. The sin which he had himself committed against the Lord Jesus, looked at from some points of view, might have been greatly extenuated on account of the honest, although mistaken, motive which lay at the bottom of it; but Paul, after allowing for his ignorance, declares that of sinners he had been chief, and that he obtained mercy that in him, first, Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. He describes himself as having been "a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious," and he is evidently lost in grateful astonishment that he should have been saved. This godly sensitiveness with regard to sin was associated in the apostle's mind with an equally vivid sense of the freeness and richness of divine grace. That Christ died, not for the righteous, but for the guilty, is the great thought which is upon his mind, and he has no hesitancy whatever in declaring it, and in speaking most boldly concerning the exceedingly abundant grace of God in forgiving sin. The union of these two feelings in Paul is by no means an unusual occurrence among human minds, for you will generally find that the preacher who is most clear in his witness that salvation is by grace, is also the man to whom sin is exceeding sinful. Indeed, all those who prize grace most are men who feel most sorrow concerning their transgressions. All systems of theology, except that which is founded upon free grace, in some way or other take off the edge of guilt. If they try to compromise the business, and make salvation to be partly a matter of human effort and human merit, and partly a work of divine grace, they are sure in the process to conceal the exceeding iniquity of sin. Man is made out to be a poor, weak creature, victimised by a law too rigid for his frailty.

No. 1,416.

It is represented that he has a right to mercy, and a great uproar is made if we deny him any such right; and much anger is felt if we declare that mercy is the sovereign prerogative of God, and may be exercised at his own absolute discretion. Rebellion against divine election is often founded on the idea that the sinner has a sort of right to be saved, and this is to deny the full desert of sin. You will find that he who sets forth free grace as the sole fountain and source of human salvation, and declares that sin is pardoned and put away freely by the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, is most plain and severe in denouncing sin with all his might, and most tender in sorrowing over his own personal iniquities. I shall preach grace to the chief of sinners at this time without reserve, and without guarding my words in any respect whatever; I shall fling the big net of the gospel right into the sea, let it go where it may; but do not, therefore, conclude that we think little of sin. Far from it; it is to us the sum of all abominations, and the fire of hell; and this I trust shall be apparent all along, though for the present we shall confine our thoughts to the greatness of the grace of God, since to that subject our text summons us.

The apostle Paul had been describing himself and his sin; he confessed that he was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, "but," saith he, "I obtained mercy." His was an instance of a sinner saved, and he now declares that his case was a type of all others, for Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. The tendency is to set up the apostle as an exceptional convert, but he corrects the idea by asserting the grand doctrine that the Saviour's errand was to those who are guilty and undeserving, among whom he counted himself to be the chief. This coming of Christ to save sinners as sinners he regards as a truth so well known in the Christian church that it had come to be a *saying*, "familiar in their mouths as household words." It had become a sort of proverb with Christians that Christ Jesus came to save sinners, and Paul says that it might justly be received as a proverb among all nations, for it was worthy of universal acceptance from the weight of its meaning, the importance of its subject, and the divine authority with which it was sealed. Moreover that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners is so true that it is not merely a saying, but a *faithful saying*, worthy of all confidence, being as sure as the truth of God himself. Pass it round, ye Christians, repeat it among yourselves without the slightest hesitancy or question; let it be a proverb among you, a fact undoubted, a truth unquestionable. For the salvation of sinners Jesus came into the world. He contemplated the saving of no other sort of persons but those who are sinful.

I. Our first observation from this statement will be **THAT SINNERS ARE IN AN AWFUL CONDITION.** A man who needs saving is evidently in a very undesirable state. Now, every man and woman among you this day who has not been saved by Christ Jesus needs saving. You have kept the law, you say, from your youth up, and what do you lack? My answer is that you need saving, notwithstanding your fine ideas about yourselves. But you have been religious also from your earliest recollection, and you do not know that you have ever committed anything very wrong. Dear friend, despite your morality and outward religiousness, we are compelled to tell you that you need saving just as surely

as the unchaste or the profane. Despite all that you say in your own favour, you have broken the law of God, and you are a sinner, and as a sinner you are in a terrible position, from which nothing can save you but the hand of God.

For, first, *it is a grave peril to be a sinner*. You have broken your Maker's command: is not that a calamity? You have neglected his will, which is holy and just and good, is not that a crying evil? To have a heart which does not choose the right, but which leans to evil, is not that ruinous? To have a mind which does not love God, but cares for itself more than for its Maker and Lord, is not that to be in a diseased state of soul? You are not in a fit state to judge, but holy beings think it so. The polluting influence of sin upon the soul is the direst of all mischiefs, the worst of all destructions: it is spiritual death. From the defiling presence of sin every man needs to be saved.

Moreover, *the thrice holy God hates sin* with a hatred scarcely to be conceived by any of us, since we have lost the sensitiveness of perfect purity. Whatsoever things are impure, unchaste, untrue, unloving, unrighteous, God loathes with all the infinity of his perfect nature. Doubtless sin is a grief to godly men, but it is far more obnoxious to the Lord our God. "The wicked, and him that loveth violence, his soul hateth." "The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination unto the Lord." The Lord hath fierce indignation against everything that is evil: this is no arbitrary trait of his character, he does not choose to be angry with this or angry with that without a cause, but from the very necessity of his divine nature he must delight in everything that is good, and he must abhor everything that is evil. O sinner, what a plight you are in since there is in you and upon you the sin which God cannot endure. What must your position be, for it is written concerning the Lord, "Thou hatest all workers of iniquity," and such are you? Can you bear the thought?

Furthermore, *you are condemned*, and before long this will be made evident to all intelligent beings. There cometh upon the swift wings of time a day in which the Judge of all the earth will lay judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet, and every transgression and iniquity shall receive its just recompense of reward. It is not possible that it should be otherwise, for there must come a reaping to every sowing. Idle thoughts and idle words, and evil deeds must bear their fruit, and hence every sinner is in danger of eternal fire. As surely as the righteous through Christ shall go into everlasting happiness, so shall the ungodly depart into everlasting punishment, where shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. And this may happen to any unpardoned sinner before he has heard the next word which I am about to utter: he may find himself shut out from all hope, eternally shut out from God ere yonder clock shall strike. This is a perilous condition for an immortal soul! Yet every sinner not saved by Christ is in this condition!

To this may be added the further reflection that *the sinner is quite unable of himself to escape* either from sin itself, or from the wrath which he has aroused, or from the punishment which is appointed for his transgressions. What canst thou do, O Ethiopian, to change thy skin? O leopard, how canst thou remove thy spots? And if, being evil, thou couldst learn to do good, how couldst thou put away the sin of the past? By what process couldst thou take out the stains of former

years? Do not the sins of thy youth lie in thy bones even to this day? and they must be there for ever unless the strong hand of Christ shall take them away. One of old cried, "O generation of vipers, how shall ye escape the damnation of hell?" and the question may well be asked of the most cunning and crafty of sinners. If ye neglect the great salvation, which it shall be our joy to preach to you to-day, how shall ye escape from the wrath to come? Shut up, then, as within a wall of fire, with that fire already burning within his soul in the form of evil lustings, and drawing nearer to him from without every day he lives, the sinner is in a terrible position indeed. O unforgiven man, what thinkest thou of this?

Perhaps that position may be all the better defined if I remind you of the way by which a sinner has to be rescued from it. There was no hope for any sinner unless the Son of God himself should save him; you may safely measure the depth of the danger by the glory of the person of him who undertook to deliver us from it. It is the Son of God whom angels worship who has come to save sinners. It must be a deep destruction from which only God himself can rescue man. And though he were the Son of God, yet when he came, observe how he had to be equipped, and from his equipment learn the sternness of the task. He must be Jesus—a Saviour; and then he must also be Christ,—anointed for the work: he must come with a commission from God, with authority divine, and the Spirit of God must rest upon him to qualify him for the great undertaking. For the text saith not that *Jesus* came into the world, but *Christ Jesus*, the anointed Saviour, came that he might save. If this equipment was needed, then surely the state of man was a grievous one. Note also that even Christ Jesus could not save men had he stayed in heaven, he *came into the world* to save sinners. The Fall was so grievous that he must come right down into the place of our ruin; he must come to the dunghill that he might lift us out of it. God sat in heaven and said, "Let there be light," and the darkness fled before him, but he could not sit in heaven and save sinners: he must needs come into the world to do so; down into this polluted creation the eternal Creator must himself descend. Lo, there in Bethlehem's manger he sleeps, and on a woman's breast he hangs! He cannot save sinners, so great is their ruin, unless he becomes incarnate and takes upon himself our nature. And being here, think how dreadful must be the ruin when we see that he cannot return, saying, "It is finished," until first of all he dies. That sacred head must be crowned with thorns, those eyes must be closed in the darkness of the tomb, that body must be pierced even to its heart, and then must lie a chill, cold corpse in the grave, ere man can be redeemed; and all that shame, and suffering, and death were but the outer shell of what the Saviour suffered, for he passed under divine wrath and bare a load such as would have crushed the whole race of men had they been left to bear it. O sinner, you are awfully lost, you are infinitely lost, since it needs an infinite Saviour to present the atonement of his own body in order to save sinners from their sin. This is the first truth then which is included in this faithful saying, may the Holy Ghost write it on our hearts.

II. The second observation, which clearly contains the very bowels of the text, is this, **THAT CHRIST JESUS CAME TO SAVE MEN AS SINNERS.**

His salvation is meant for men who are sinners, and for none else. Somebody says, "But is not that a plain matter of fact?" It is, but it is a fact scarcely ever realized: indeed its real meaning is not known until God the Holy Ghost reveals it. A great many persons have a notion that Christ Jesus came into the world to save respectable people, who if they have done any wrong have repented of it, and have made things square. He came, according to them, to save persons who do their very best by attendance at worship, and taking the sacrament, and giving to the poor, and paying their way, and saying their prayers. These are doing all they can to get right, and keep right, and surely they will be saved, so men talk. Their theory of salvation is very mixed, but it comes to this, that the gospel is for good people. They do not quite do without Jesus Christ,—he comes in somewhere or other; but their religion is a kind of mingle-mangle,—partly they save themselves and partly Christ saves them, and between the two they are not saved at all. Their vain fancy is that, though they cannot do quite as much as they ought, Jesus comes in as an excellent make-weight, and turns the scale in their favour. That is the notion of the bulk of mankind, and in many places of worship you may hear something very like it. Too much of the preaching of the present day mingles the old covenant with the new: you do not know whether after all you are going to be saved by merit or mercy, whether Christ came to save sinners or the righteous. The trumpet gives an uncertain sound.

It is far too generally supposed that there must be something to recommend the sinner to God, and that God could not send his Son to save men whom he views in the base and horrible character of sinners. "Surely," say the enemies of free grace, "he must have regard to their repentance or to something which he either sees or foresees in them." That he should see man to be evil and only evil, and yet visit him in mercy for mercy's sake, seems hard for the carnal heart to believe. Therefore, lest we should be misunderstood, we lay down this straight line, that Christ did not come into the world to save anybody but sinners, and he viewed those sinners as sinners and nothing more: he did not view them as repenting sinners, nor as believing sinners, nor as humble sinners, nor as sanctified sinners, nor anything else but sinners, and under that character he contemplated their salvation. The text saith nothing more and nothing less than that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save *sinners*"; there is not a qualifying word.

It is clear that sinners only are the objects of salvation, for none but sinners need saving, and if there had been no sinners there would certainly have been no *saving* and no *Saviour*. Who wants saving but a lost man? Who wants a Saviour but a man who through his sin has ruined himself? The very term "Saviour" and the very name "Jesus" imply that salvation work is for sinners. We have some sinecure offices in our Government: I have heard of a Master of the Buckhounds, who never mastered a buckhound in his life; but my Lord Jesus holds no sinecure in his office of Saviour, for there are plenty of sinners, and he is always saving them. If sinners are not contemplated by the plan of grace, then the office of Saviour is obsolete; but this can never be, since he is Jesus Christ, the anointed Saviour, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

Nor would *the gospel* be required for any but sinners, since none but

the guilty need glad tidings of pardon and grace. If man can be secure under the law let him keep under the law : if the law can justify, let the law justify. What need of a second system to take away the first unless through the weakness of man the first system shall be found to be of none effect ? No, verily the law is glorious ; Mount Sinai shineth resplendently, and verily perfection would have been by the law if it could have been kept by mankind. No need for another glory or excellency, for the first would have sufficed if men had not been sinners ; for the law is holy, and just, and good. The very sound of that word "gospel" is lost, and its sweetness dissipated in the midnight air unless there be sinners, for they above all men need glad tidings of a Saviour born among men.

Salvation must be for sinners, for to them only can *mercy* ever come. If I am brought before a court of justice, and I plead "Not guilty," and the magistrate replies that he will have mercy upon me, I repel his observation with indignation ; I want no mercy of him ; I am innocent. Let him give me justice, and that is all I ask. It is an insult to the innocent to offer him mercy ; and therefore unless man is guilty God cannot show him mercy. Mercy has no room to bestow her blessings of amnesty and pardon till first of all guilt is admitted. To the sinner forgiveness can come, but to none else.

Moreover, *the characters whom Jesus came to save are always so described that they must be sinners.* Sometimes we read of them as being "dead in trespasses and sins," and it is written, "And you hath he quickened." Sometimes they are represented as enemies : "If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." They are called aliens, strangers, wandering sheep, prodigal sons, and so forth ; and all these imply distance from God by sin. Sometimes they are represented as debtors, and when they have nothing to pay he freely forgives them all their debt. All the descriptions of persons for whom the mercy of God is intended bear upon their forefront the notion of their being sinners, and our Lord himself saith, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." The coming of Christ has no bearing towards the ninety-and-nine that went not astray, except that they are left where they were. The Good Shepherd comes after the lost sheep and only after the lost sheep, and if you can prove that you are not a lost sheep then you have proved that Christ never came to save you. The whole of his errand looks this way, he came to save sinners and only sinners.

Look now at *what he did* when he was here. I will only ask you to consider the crowning act of his work, when he hung upon the cross. What mean those bruising of the scourge ? What mean those deep furrows on his blessed back ? What mean those pierced hands and feet ? They mean this, that he is suffering on account of human sin. "The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." "All we like sheep have gone astray ; we have turned every one to his own way ; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Self-righteous men and women, what has the cross to do with you ? You carry it on your bosoms, and make an ornament and a plaything of it, and that is all it is to you. None but the guilty can know the true meaning of the cross, and derive benefit therefrom. For them the dreadful tree bears the precious fruit of substitutionary sacrifice, and peace and pardon through the atoning blood ; but to those who are not

sinners the cross is a barren tree. O Christ of God, only a sinner can know thy worth. A saint may admire thee in thy glory, but a sinner trusts thee in thy shameful death, for thou art meant for sinners. "He gave himself for our sins,"—for what else could he give himself and yield himself unto death?

Besides that, where is Jesus gone now but to heaven? And *what is he doing?* When he went to heaven he received gifts for men, and, listen to this word!—"Yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." He pleads to-day, but for whom is he an advocate? He made intercession for the transgressors. Prove that you are not rebellious nor transgressors, and there are neither gifts nor pleadings for you, for the whole drift of what he is now doing is towards the sinful.

Look you, sirs, at the legacy which our Lord has left us. He has left us the Holy Spirit, and what for? The Holy Spirit is here to convince of sin. Of what use would he be to those who have no sin? He is here to regenerate, but of what use would he be to those who are so good by nature that they do not need a change of heart. He is here that he may work in us repentance and faith, but of what use would those be to persons who have no sin to repent of, and no need to believe in a Saviour? The whole plan and scheme of redemption contains in it marks and evidences clear and palpable that it is meant for sinners, for guilty men, for such and such alone. All else that there is in man beside his sinnership is not truly his. If I were to preach to-day to sinners with some qualification, I should not be preaching the gospel in its fullest reach. If, for instance, I were to say that Christ Jesus came into the world to save humble sinners, that would be a clipping of the truth; for if any sinner be humble, that humility is not natural to him, but already the work of salvation has commenced in his being made humble. Jesus Christ died to give humility to sinners as well as to save them when they are humble. But surely we must believe in Christ? Yes, and there is salvation for believing sinners; but no man believes in Christ until that faith is given to him from above, and Christ came not to save sinners who make themselves believe, but to save sinners by giving them faith. He not only saves sinners when they repent, but he goes lower down, for he is exalted on high to give repentance as well as remission of sins. But did he not die for penitent sinners? Assuredly; but he died for them when they were impenitent, and therefore it is that they come to repentance. He who would come to Jesus must come as a sinner, and never think of pleading any sort of goodness or qualification; for "this is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." SINNERS—write that in capitals, and set it by itself, for it is the whole of the description, and no one may dare to add thereto. Away with your human addition of *sensible* sinners, and so on; the text is not cumbered and spoiled by any such qualifying words.

III. This leads me, in the third place, to say THAT UPON THIS POINT SPECIAL CLEARNESS IS REQUIRED. That Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners as sinners must always be kept clearly before the human mind; because, as I have said, man does not like the notion, and if you put it baldly and boldly he cavils at it, and waxes wrathful. Hear

him mutter about immoral doctrine and encouraging sin. Hear it, and marvel at the audacity which makes a guilty rebel express anxiety about the morals of his God. A set of criminals are shut up in a condemned cell to be hanged, and a message comes that the king freely forgives them, and they exclaim that they will not accept mercy because it might encourage immorality. Morality! What have these lawbreakers to do with that? Surely they are repeating the devil's hypocrisy when he rebuked sin. They are living in sin and yet pretend to be the guardians of universal justice. Vile hypocrisy! When I have known the pens which have written against the gospel under the pretence of advancing morality, I have pitied the paper which they defiled with their black words. Plead for morality! Why, men known to be debauched and drunken are often the very loudest talkers against free grace, and the greatest sticklers for morality. Let them go and wash in Jordan seven times and be clean themselves before coming out in that fashion. It is for you and me, being guilty, to get mercy first, and then talk of what we will do in the matter of morality. Know ye not that the man who believeth not in Christ is condemned already? Shall a condemned man cavil at mercy's freeness? On your knees, sir, and plead guilty before the Most High, for so only shall you find grace.

How often are we told in sermons that we are in a state of probation: as if we had to do something by which we should prove our worthiness, and were still in a position in which we might or might not be condemned. My hearers, you are not in a state of probation, no, not one of you. If you are saved, you are saved, and if you are not saved you are lost. You are forgiven, or else you are "condemned already"; and, unless Jesus Christ saves you, you will abide in condemnation for ever and ever. The die is cast, man, and cast against you! You are condemned, and in the book of God so it stands. Christ Jesus came to save the condemned, and blessed shall you be if you are willing to take up the condemned position at this moment, and accept the grace which he has brought for sinners. I say, then, let the truth be made clear, because man will muddle it if he can.

Mark you, *if this doctrine is not made very clear you will not lead sinners to look to Christ.* If I preach that Jesus Christ died to save men of tender heart, what will be the result of the sermon? Every thoughtful hearer will look to see whether he has a tender heart. Is that a desirable result?

"There is life for a look at the Crucified One,"

but there is no life by looking into our own hearts. Suppose I preach certain marks and evidences as tokens of the men whom Christ came to save, then each man will look to see whether he has those tokens within himself: and that is precisely the thing which we do not want men to do, for we desire them to look right away from themselves to Christ alone. If they should imagine that they find some good thing within themselves they will make it the real basis of their hope, and that will be an error of the gravest kind. Sinner, all the hope you can ever have lies in him who died upon the tree. As for yourself, settle it in your mind that you are as bad as bad can be. Give over all hope from your own doings, willings, feelings, and resolves, and no more expect to obtain comfort from

your own nature than to find fire in the midst of a rock of ice. Look right away from self to Christ, and Christ alone, for this is the way of salvation.

When a man comes to Christ as a sinner he has taken *the safest way*. If I say to myself, "Jesus came to save me because I am a believing sinner, or a repenting sinner, or a humbled sinner," then I have to ask the question, "How about my repentance, my humbling, are they genuine?" My foundation shakes and my trust fails me, because it rests on myself; but when I trust in Jesus because he is the sinner's Saviour, and because I am a sinner, then I am beyond doubtful questions.

This also is *a constant ground* to go upon. Imagine a man who is deeply in debt saying to his creditors, "I am in a terrible fix, but I can promise you ten shillings in the pound." Very well; they accept it. Is he not at ease? Let me whisper in your ear,—he is not worth two-pence in all the world. Is he clear? Oh no. He tries a little trading, and puts off the hour of payment, but again he has to call his creditors together, and he confesses, "I am sorry I cannot manage the ten shillings, but I will try to scrape together two-and-sixpence: will you take that?" Yes, they will take the half-crown. Is he not out of his difficulties now? No, he is not one inch nearer, for he is not worth a penny. Again he summons his creditors, and protests that he has been under a mistake, but he could arrange to pay sixpence. Is he not at rest now? Not a bit of it, because he has not a farthing, and he can no more pay sixpence in the pound than the whole twenty shillings. He is absolutely a pauper. What is the best thing for him to do? Why, to own the truth and say, "Here I am, I have no assets whatever: I am in debt over head and ears, and I have not a single penny to pay with. Do whatever you like with me. Put me in prison if you like: sell these bones and the rags which cover them; but there is the truth, you cannot get anything out of me, because I have nothing." Now, if the creditors give him a clear discharge, he is safe and at rest, which he never was while he had even a sixpence to pay. Now ye needy sinners, be wise and go to the Lord in that penniless style and you shall have your debt frankly forgiven. Remember the parable of the two debtors, and the truth which it teaches.

"But let our debts be what they may,
However great or small,
As soon as we have nought to pay,
Our Lord forgives us all."

Assuredly, there is nothing like going to the bottom of a thing, and knowing the worst of your case. I have a friend who had a bad knee, something ailed it, he could not tell what. The doctors blistered, and poulticed, and did a great deal to it, and showed their skill by making bad worse, but they assured him that the knee was not out of joint, but would come all right by outward applications. Under such professional treatment the patient became quite lame. At last he went to a renowned bone-setter; and as soon as he saw the joint, he said, "I tell you, sir, your bone is out." "Impossible," said he, "the doctors have never hinted at that." "Yes, it is; or if it is not so, we will make it so, and then set it right." With a terrible pull the operator seemed to drag the bone out of its place, and then it flew back again, into its socket, and the

man felt that all was right. "Now," said the bone-setter, "walk across the room," and he did so at once. There is nothing like knowing that the bone is out, for then it can be set; but while we understate the mischief we shall not find an effectual cure. Reckon on the worst, and you will not be deceived. If there is something good about you, and you begin trusting in it, that something good will grow less and less, like the twenty shillings which came down to sixpence and ended with nothing; but if you throw up all legal hope and say, "I am a sinner, and if I am saved it must be entirely through the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, and I accept Christ to save me as a sinner,"—that is a sure and constant foundation to rest upon. Beware of the slippery belief that Christ died for you as long as you are humble, or as long as you are this or that; for, if you talk in that fashion, instead of trusting in Christ you are trusting in your own humility, your own feelings, and there is no soundness in your faith.

Often, beloved, do I feel that this way of coming to Christ, as a sinner, is the *only available one* for me. I have preached the gospel, not without zeal for the truth, and have tried to consecrate my whole being to my Lord's service, but times out of mind I would not give a brass farthing for all that I have done or felt or been, but I am glad to sink the whole in oblivion, and come to Christ and say, "Save me, for I have sinned." What I rejoice to do I feel sure that my brethren have to do also, and it will be your safety to be so doing continually.

Why, brethren, this doctrine must be true because *it glorifies Christ*. If Christ comes to save men who meet him half way with their prayers and tears and believings and doings, and he only saves them because of these things, then salvation is half of man and half of Christ; but if it be so that Jesus comes to save sinners, and begins a work in them when they are in their nakedness and filthiness and spiritual death, oh, then, free grace doth the more abound, and the crown sits securely on the royal head of him who is anointed to be both a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance as well as remission of sins.

I want to say also that the recognition of the truth that Christ came into the world to save men as sinners is *essential to salvation*. You ask me, "How so?" I reply, "When a man comes before God simply as a sinner he is then upon the line of truth." All the while he was claiming to be this and that, which was good, he was on a false tack; but when he says, "Lord, I have broken thy law, I have done the things I ought not to have done, and have left undone the things that I ought to have done; and if I am saved it must be by thy grace alone"; he is now speaking according to truth. It is something to bring a sinner round to the truth. When he has come to that, he will go further in the right direction. Do you not see that he is doing homage to the law of God, for he confesses that he has broken it, and deserves punishment? Thus the man is already honouring the law of God in his heart: his salvation has begun. Now he does honour to God himself, for he bows before the Most High and sues for mercy. He is already saved from presumption. God must be King, and the man is willing that he should be, even though he himself should be condemned. And now he reads that God's salvation "comes to the guilty," and he cries, "I am guilty; I accept thy mercy." That done, he loves

the Lord God for mercy received. Why, the man is being saved before our eyes. He was the enemy of God before, but now a sense of free mercy causes him to love and fear the Lord. The next thing he says is, "Have I been so freely forgiven all my transgressions, not because of anything I was or felt or did, but out of free mercy? Then, Lord, I will strive to avoid every sin, if thou wilt help me." See, his mind is becoming pure, and by the operation of the same blessed truth upon him he will ultimately be perfected and stand before the throne complete, and what think you will be his song? He will join with all the saints and sing, "We have washed our robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." There is nothing like free grace to change the human heart. You may tell a man what he is and what he ought to be, and he will remain unmoved; but tell him that God meets him as a lost, guilty, and condemned sinner, and that simply because he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, he blots out all his sins and transgressions and accepts him through Christ Jesus; why, that makes the man's heart leap within him for joy, and then he begins to say, "Cleanse me, O God, from this hateful sin, for I love thee because of thy wondrous love to me." Thus Jesus Christ's coming to save sinners makes the point of our being sinners a very essential one in the matter of our being saved from the power of sin.

IV. I close by saying, let us, dear friends, feel THAT IT WILL BE WISE TO ACCEPT AT ONCE THE TEACHING OF THE TEXT. Let us on the spot confess our sinnership. Whether you have been saved or not, come over again to Jesus. Take with you words and say unto him, "We have sinned." Confess your sinnership. Does it trouble you to do so? Have not you abundant evidence of it? Do not confess it with your mouth only, but with your heart. Let me tell you sinners are very rare things: you cannot find them dead or alive. If you go into a cemetery with an intelligent child, the first question it will ask will be, "Papa, where do they bury the sinners? These are all good people who are buried here." Living sinners are equally scarce. We are all surprisingly good, and though we say we are sinners, that is a part of our goodness, for it shows how very humble we are. If we come to detail, and are questioned as to our sins, how many turn out to be no more sinners than the beggars in the street are really lame, or blind, or sick, or sore; many who say, "Lord, have mercy upon us miserable sinners," do but sham their sinnership before God. Now, mark, there is nothing but sham salvation for sham sinners. But you real sinners, you who have broken God's law and know it, and are ready to stand upon the drop of confession beneath the fatal tree of justice, feeling that you could not say a word against divine justice if you were now executed, come and welcome, for Jesus Christ came to save such as you are. Confess your sin, and when you have done so rest on the salvation provided in Christ Jesus.

At this moment I think I speak the language of every child of God when I say the top and bottom, the beginning and the ending of all my hope lies in this, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. I just trust myself as a sinner with him. The devil often tells me, "You are not this, and you are not that," and I feel bound to own that the accuser of the brethren makes terrible work with my spiritual finery, so that I have to abandon one ground of glorying after another; but I never

knew the devil himself dare to say, "You are not a sinner." He knows I am, and I know it too ; and as in due time Christ died for the ungodly, I just rest in him, and I am saved. If I can perish resting in Christ I must do so ; but I will tell it throughout the realms of hell that I did trust in Christ, and was lost. I will publish it in the infernal dens that I trusted in Jesus with all my soul, and was confounded. Will it ever be? No, never ; for he hath said, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."

Poor sinner, whoever you may be, surely this is a very simple matter ; but do not reject it because it is so simple. It is your life. You shall find it your life at this very instant if you will trust my Lord. Have you any doubt about your being a sinner? Then bid farewell to hope, for Christ did not come to save you ; but if you know you are a sinner, cast yourself on Jesus now, even now, just as you are. "Will he save me?" Try it, brother, try it ; sink or swim, fling yourself upon Christ. Are you still holding to your prayers or your tears, or somewhat of your own? You will perish if you do. You must be disconnected with all grounds of self-hope and self-trust, or they will prove your ruin. Now cut the hawser ; let every rope go ; break the last thread, and commit yourself to the tide of free grace. You will never be a wreck if you do so. Well does Dr. Watts put it,—

"A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
On Christ's kind arms I fall ;
Be thou my strength and righteousness,
My Jesus and my all."

"You have taken away from us, sir, every hope we ever had, and you make us out to be nothing but sinners." Yes, that is what I want to do ; I long to make all things rock and reel under you, till you feel that you have no place for the sole of your feet, and so fall before the cross. This old house of yours which you have been patching up so often will fall upon you before long. Its walls bulge, its roof drops, its timbers are rotten ; however much you try to prop it up it will come down and destroy you. I, as an architect, advise you to sweep it all down. Clear every wall away, stick and stone. Yes, and take out the very foundations, for every stone is ruinous. Clear the ground of the whole concern. You complain that there is a deep and ugly trench where the foundations used to be, and I am glad of it, for, behold, the Lord lays in Zion, for a foundation, a stone, elect, precious, even Christ Jesus, and he that believeth in him shall never be confounded. You must remove all the wood, hay, and stubble, and build with precious stones. None but Jesus, none but Jesus : neither beam, nor stone, nor pin, nor nail, must be our own. We may not take from a thread to a shoe-latchet of self, but Christ must be first, last, midst, and everywhere. What say you, brother sinner? Will you and I have Christ? I will, whether you will or not. Come along. Do not draw back. Take what God freely presents to you, and from this day trust Jesus to be your Saviour, and we will meet in heaven. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalms xxxii. and li.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—241, 555, 540.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

“THY SALVATION.”

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 2ND, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”—Luke ii. 28-30.

LAST Lord's-day morning we used the broad axe to clear the forest of self-righteousness: one after another human hopes were made to fall, for the axe was laid unto the root of the trees. Now let us cultivate the clearing, and sow the good seed therein. We might have had for our motto then, “The Lord of hosts hath purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth.” We tried to sweep away every vestige of anything like self-trust as we showed that Christ Jesus came to save men as sinners, and that only as sinners could they have any part or lot in him. Our Lord gave himself for our sins, but he never gave himself for our righteousness. We bore witness that human goodness is a mere fiction, and that it is rather a hindrance than a help to the work of salvation, since it opposes itself to the grand principle of grace, by which alone men can be saved. So far our work has been to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, and we hope it has been done very thoroughly. Now, there is a time to build up as well as a time to break down, and as we showed on the former occasion where salvation is not and cannot be, so to-day let us, by the help of God's Spirit, endeavour to point out where salvation really is; so that those who have learned to look away from themselves may now be taught to look to Christ. May the Holy Spirit grant us this desire of our heart, and may thousands by this sermon find salvation.

Observe that Simeon found Christ in the temple, being conducted thither by the Holy Ghost. There was an ancient promise, “The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple,” and this probably drew the holy man to the courts of the Lord. But the Lord might have come, and Simeon might not have been there, or the good old man might have been occupied in some other court of the holy place: but being led of

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the Spirit he came to the appointed spot at the very time when the mother of Christ was bringing the babe in her arms to do for him according to the law. In this Simeon is an instance of the truth that they find Christ who are led by the Spirit, and they alone. No man ever comes to Christ by his own wit and wisdom, nor by his own unprompted will: he alone who is drawn of the Spirit cometh unto Christ. We must submit ourselves to divine teaching and divine drawing, or else Christ may come in his temple, but we shall not perceive him. I therefore would earnestly remark at the outset of this discourse, how needful it is that we should submit ourselves to the movements of the Holy Spirit upon our souls; let me rather say what a privilege it is to be moved by the Spirit, and how gladly we should welcome his divine influences. Beloved hearer, as you love your soul, be very tender towards the Holy Ghost, and prize even the least spark of his divine fire. Quench not the Spirit, neither grieve him. Prize the love of the Spirit, and pray to feel his power. When he comes upon you to convince you of sin, be plastic in his hand, yield to his teaching, and humbly confess the faults and follies of which he convicts you. When he comes to lead you gently to the Saviour, be not as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, but gladly follow where he draws, according to the prayer of the spouse in the song, "Draw me, we will run after thee." All your hope of finding Christ, dear seeking friend, lies in the Spirit of God illuminating your understanding, constraining your will, and quickening your affections: therefore never vex him, but be ever ready to obey his faintest monition. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and when you feel its breath be glad to spread your wings that you may be borne upward by its power.

Simeon being thus led of the Spirit, came where Christ was, but mark how quick the old man's eyes were to see him. How should he know that this babe in swaddling clothes was the Lord's Christ? Doubtless there were many others in the temple who saw Joseph and Mary and the priest, but they thought that nothing was to be seen but a young peasant woman and her husband bringing their poor offering to redeem their first-born child. The frequenters of the temple passed to and fro and felt no interest in so common a scene, but the watching eyes of Simeon had no sooner lighted upon the infant person of our divine Lord than at once they were held spellbound and filled with tears of joy. The aged saint went immediately to the mother, took up the babe in his arms and without hesitation said, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation." Those who have been looking and longing for Christ are usually the first to perceive him. This man had been waiting for the consolation of Israel, and in the process he had gained discernment, so that when Jesus appeared he knew him at once. O soul, if you are longing for Christ you will know when he is near you, even as the thirsting harts of the desert scent the waters from afar. If you have an intense hunger after the Lord Jesus you will not need to be told which is bread; you will not be deceived by a stone, for your hunger will instruct you. In this case an instinct springs out of an appetite, discernment grows out of desire: if you long for Christ you will not readily be deceived by false teachers, for you will know what your soul craves after, and will not be content with anything else. As soon as a truly awakened soul sees Jesus,

though it be but the beginnings of him, it recognizes him : it recognizes the hem of his garment, and the print of his feet. Though the Lord be seen only as an infant, and the heart's idea of him is very incomplete, yet he is perceived to be The Incomparable One, and the soul cries out, "He is all my salvation and all my desire." May we thus be taught by the Spirit of God, and thus made to long for Christ, and we shall have a quickness of eye to perceive him, and to see infinitely more in him than this blind world hath ever dreamed.

From Simeon we shall try to learn this morning. Should not the aged teach us wisdom ? Three things appear to me to be worthy of our attentive observation : first, *that Christ is salvation*, for that is the pith and marrow of Simeon's song—"Mine eyes have seen thy salvation"; secondly, *that Christ is to be taken up into the arms and looked upon*; and thirdly, *that when he is thus treated Christ has a wonderful effect upon the soul*. May we be led to try all this for ourselves. Personal testing is far better than mere hearing. I may preach to you and it may end in nothing, but if you will now come and take my Lord in your arms, an eternity of good will come of it. O taste and see that the Lord is good.

I. In the first place we learn from Simeon that CHRIST IS SALVATION. He is a Saviour, for so the angels sang—"Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord": but he is more than a Saviour, *he is salvation itself*. Moses sang, "He also hath become my salvation." David said, "The Lord is my light, and my salvation," and Isaiah exclaimed, "Behold, God is my salvation." It is well to see salvation in the work, life, and death of Christ, but we must never forget that the essence of it lies in his person : he himself is salvation. Then took he *him* up in his arms and said, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation." This was before our Lord had begun to preach or to teach, or to suffer for our sins : as a babe he was God's salvation. The gospel loses very much of its sweetness when the person of Christ is placed in the background, and treated as if it were a mere myth, or as if it was quite a secondary consideration. Why, this is the choicest dainty of the feast, the most substantial food whereon the saints are nourished : his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed. Everything about our Lord is saving, but he himself is salvation. His teaching, his example, his love, his tenderness, his sufferings, his glory—all help us ; but it is his own glorious self which puts efficacy into them. Had he not been man he could not have died, and had he not been God his dying could not have availed for our redemption. It is what he *is* which gives virtue to what he *does*. We are bidden to come, not to his work, but to himself—"Come unto *me*, all ye that labour and are heavy laden." To him we do come, and our heart can say, "He only is my rock and my salvation."

Let us pursue this theme by saying of our Lord that *he is the only salvation*. Simeon had not found another. We are told of that aged saint that he was just and devout, and assuredly if any man could have seen salvation by the law Simeon would have seen it. Just towards man, devout towards God, he had hit upon the true balance of a perfect character ; but he had not seen salvation in his own character, he looked for it to the Lord's Christ. Neither to his honest actions before his fellow men, nor to his secret prayers and communings with God, did Simeon turn for eternal life, otherwise he would not have been looking for a salvation

which he had already found; nor would he at the sight of Jesus have rapturously exclaimed. "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation." Not in thyself, O Simeon, not in all that thou hadst done, or felt, or said, hadst thou seen salvation; but there in the babe thou didst behold it with supreme delight.

Simeon, too, had been very familiar with the courts of the Lord's house. He was one of those who almost lived in the temple. Sacrifices were seen by him every morning and every evening, and upon all high festivals; but in the blood of bullocks and lambs he had never seen salvation. Frequently did he gaze upon the instructive types and symbolic ordinances of the law; but as he looked on them he saw only shadows, and still watched for the substance. Never over the morning lamb, or the paschal supper, had Simeon said, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation": that exclamation was never uttered till he had seen Christ himself. Beloved, salvation is not to be found in ordinances nor in sacraments. God forbid we should say when we have seen baptism, or the imitation of it, "We yield thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate this infant with thy Holy Spirit, to receive him for thine own child by adoption, and to incorporate him in thy holy church." There are some who wickedly talk so, though we can hardly imagine that they believe what they say. It is in vain to show them their folly, they are wedded to it: but let us pray, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." God forbid we should talk about salvation in connection with the Lord's supper as the superstitious do, who seem to regard it as a passport to Paradise, and therefore press it upon the dying. Truly we may in the Lord's supper eat and drink condemnation to ourselves unless we discern the Lord's body. It is in the Lord himself that there is salvation, and in none other; not even in the outward ordinances of God's ordaining is salvation to be found, for the Lord has not placed it there. See Jesus and you have seen salvation, and the only salvation. The most moral life and the most attentive remembrance of sacred ceremonies will land you short of the salvation of your soul unless you see Jesus and take him to be your all in all. We must all learn to sing that song which Isaiah has recorded in his twelfth chapter—"Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation."

According to Simeon's song the Lord Jesus is *God's salvation*. Dwell on that little word "Thy." "Mine eyes have seen *thy* salvation." In the person of Christ we see the salvation which God had of old covenanted to bestow upon his people; the salvation which in due season the Lord had prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel. The promised, predestinated, and prepared salvation of God is Christ Jesus. This is the salvation of which the prophets spake, to which all the symbols pointed—the salvation which was hidden from ages and from generations, that it might shine forth like the sun upon this favoured dispensation. It is a salvation devised and provided by God, which manifests and glorifies God; a salvation which is Godlike, being both just and gracious, and beyond conception great; in a word, it is God's salvation. O beloved, think much of Christ because the Lord God Almighty ordained him for

you, and gives him to you. God gave up his own Son for you, even his well-beloved Son ; and he himself, by the Holy Ghost, has revealed him to you and in you, teaching you to know him, to trust him, to love him, and to follow him. Therefore value Jesus beyond all price as God's own salvation. God himself accepts Christ in our stead, and makes him our salvation : will not we accept him ? God himself doth rest in Christ, will not we rest in him ? God smelleth a sweet savour in the sacrifice which Christ has offered : will not we also rejoice therein and eat the peace offering, and be glad before the Lord ? Are any of you seeking salvation at this moment ? I pray you do not think of inventing a saviour of your own, but be willing to take God's salvation ; and when you ask what and who that salvation is, our only answer must be—Christ is the salvation of God. If you have seen Jesus by the eye of faith your eyes have seen God's salvation ; you are saved, saved on the spot, saved for ever. Jesus is heaven's balm for earth's wounds, God's remedy for man's diseases, do not put away this priceless boon of infinite mercy. Receive it heartily : receive it at once. Jesus is set before you, take him up in your arms.

When Simeon said, " Mine eyes have seen thy salvation," he must have meant that in that little babe he saw *salvation set forth in its essence*. Can you bring yourselves now in fancy and in faith, which may for the once work together, into the courts of the temple ? Can you see Mary with the little Christ in her arms ? Look upon him and take him up, and put yourself into Simeon's place and say, " Mine eyes have seen thy salvation." This little child is salvation, and yet how can it be ? By the light of Scripture we can understand what else would seem incredible. For here is, first, God in human flesh : the divine nature in mysterious union with the human. Behold, he who is now in your arms as an infant is also the infinite God ; feeble as he is as to his humanity, he is omnipotent as to his deity ; he is at once the Son of man and the Son of God. Herein is man's salvation. When we think of the fact that God came down to our low estate and espoused our nature, we are sure that he means nothing but good to man, and we are ready to burst out with Simeon's joyous exclamation and cry, " Mine eyes have seen thy salvation." We are sure that man will be lifted up to heaven now that heaven has come down to man.

Our Lord was not merely a child, but a poor child ; so poor that his mother when she had to redeem him could not bring a lamb, which was the sacrifice for all who could afford it, but she presented the poorer offering, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons, and so she came as a poor woman, and he was presented to the Lord as a poor woman's child. Herein also lies rich comfort for lowly hearts, and as they think of it each one may say, " Mine eyes have seen thy salvation." When I think of the Prince of glory and the Lord of angels stooping so low as this, that a poor woman bears him in her arms and calls him her babe, surely there must be salvation for the lowest, the poorest, and the most sunken. When the all glorious Lord, in order to be incarnate, is born a babe, born of a poor woman, and publicly acknowledged as a poor woman's child, we feel sure that he will receive the poorest and most despised when they seek his face. Yes, Jesus, the son of the carpenter, means salvation to carpenters and all others of lowly rank.

But why has Mary brought him to the temple? She has brought him to redeem him. He was her firstborn, and therefore he must be redeemed. Was he then under the law? Yes, for our sakes he was under the law; and he who redeemed us had to be himself redeemed. When I think of the twelve and sixpence, or thereabouts, which his mother paid as redemption money, what a contrast rises before me! He hath redeemed us unto God by his blood, and yet as Mary's firstborn a price was paid in silver for him. "A goodly price that I was priced at of them." Now, because our Lord Jesus came under the law and obeyed its precepts we see salvation in him. When God himself, incarnate, came under the law, so as to have redemption money paid for him, we understand it all, for it is written, "But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." This wondrous stoop of deity to lowly humanity, and this marvellous honouring of the law in our nature by one who is Immanuel, God with us, has brought salvation to our fallen race. Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice, for Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

But, to my mind, Simeon did not only see salvation represented in its essence, but his faith saw *salvation guaranteed* by the appearance of the wondrous child. Incarnation is the beginning of substitution, and the commencement of substitution is the guarantee of the completion and the continuance of it. Our Lord would not have taken upon himself the nature of the seed of Abraham if he had not intended by so doing effectually to redeem and deliver them. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." Be ye sure of this, that he will not commence to battle with Satan and then leave the conflict before the enemy is destroyed. In that babe Simeon did well to see all the work of saving men, for the appearing of the Lord in our flesh and blood was the sure pledge of it. He saw there a perfect obedience presented to God, for the babe was brought under the law at the very outset, and its redemption money was paid, a sure sign that to the end the incarnate God would say, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." No jot or tittle of the law would Christ omit, since even as a babe he was both circumcised and presented in the temple according to the law.

Simeon, I doubt not, saw in the presentation of Christ in the temple a foreshadowing of his crucificial death. The time would come when he must be brought to the altar, and no redemption would be offered for him, for he himself must be the price for his people. Simeon saw as he gazed upon the child the agony and bloody sweat, the cross and passion, for he knew that the incarnate God would not shrink from anything which he had undertaken. That fair and lovely face, the most beautiful probably that human eye ever rested upon,—he could, by faith, see it more marred than that of any man, while in our stead he suffered the wrath of God.

Simeon was so well instructed that his faith saw the child in due time

dead, dead because the law had carried out its penalty and the sin-bearer had been made to die. And he could see the resurrection too. As he saw the child carried home by the rejoicing mother, because he had been redeemed, he foresaw the hour when Jesus should return unto the Father, having accomplished eternal redemption for all his people. He saw in that child both light and glory, and he felt deep peace suffuse his mind at the sight, and therefore I feel sure that he saw in the infant Christ the pledge and assurance of that perfected work which closed with, "It is finished." Bethlehem ensures Gethsemane and Calvary, for the Christ of God will not fail nor be discouraged, but having put forth his hand he will finish the work which his Father gave him to do.

So then, beloved, if you see Christ you have seen the sum and total of his work. His person is so intimately connected with all that he has done that he bears within himself all its virtue and efficacy, and by a look at him we receive the result of all that he has accomplished. Trust Jesus as born in our nature, as living a life of holiness, as dying a sacrificial death, as buried, as risen, as interceding, and as by and by to come again, and you have salvation. Jesus anywhere, Jesus everywhere, is salvation. Those who have only a contracted view of him and behold him rather in his infancy than in his glory have nevertheless seen his salvation. Come then ye trembling, tottering, timorous ones and see salvation secured by a Saviour who exactly suits your weakness. Even a feeble old man can lift a babe; come in your feebleness and embrace the Saviour in whose condescending littleness salvation lies secure.

I might say many things here, but I prefer just to keep to that one point, that *Jesus Christ is the whole of salvation*. Simeon did not say, "Mine eyes have seen a part of thy salvation." No, but the whole of it. Christ bought by his blood all that was needful for our redemption, and having bought it he brought it down to us, descending to seek and to save the lost. He came on earth to proclaim salvation, and to let all men know that it is treasured up in him. "It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell." As he contains salvation so doth he dispense it, for he is exalted on high to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins. As he doth dispense it, so out of his fulness hath he made all of us to receive grace for grace. Because he draws us to himself we have come, and are coming to him perpetually. In him we have our life preserved, and by him our steps are upheld, for because he lives we live also, and he is made of God unto us wisdom and sanctification.

Christ has salvation within himself, and he that getteth him has complete salvation. "He that believeth in him hath everlasting life." Brother, you are saved from the ruin of the fall if you have Christ; the second Adam has repaired the ruins of the first. Brother, you are saved from the guilt of sin if you have Christ, for your sin is yours no longer; it is not imputed unto you,—*"The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."* Brother, you are delivered from the power of original sin if you have Christ; for, behold, the new-born life within you shall be in you a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. Christ has entered into you, and he will bind the strong man armed, and cast him out. In having Christ, my brother, you have obtained victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; for this is the victory which overcometh all these, even our faith. Go forward and grasp what is already your own. Yea,

and when death comes it shall not be death to you, for he that liveth and believeth in him shall never die. You shall be more than a conqueror in this thing also, therefore be not in bondage through fear of death.

You have salvation in every aspect of it, and every form of it as soon as you have obtained Christ. Very commonplace teaching, perhaps, you think. Yes, let it be commonplace; let it be the bread you live upon, the air you breathe. I beseech you never forget that the whole of salvation is in Christ. Do not expect to find a portion of it in yourselves, nor in outward ordinances, nor in the works of the law, nor in priestcraft, nor anywhere else; for the body of salvation is Christ, and all its substance is in him. Do you demur to this? Then let me ask you, in what point is Christ deficient? What more do you need? Do you want penances? Hath he not already suffered all that justice requires? What do you want? Would you toil to gain the kingdom of heaven? Lo, he hath opened it to all believers by a toil which covered him with bloody sweat. What more is required? Washing? There is the fountain filled with blood. Clothing? There is the robe of spotless righteousness. Medicine? Truly with his stripes we are healed. Think of aught that can be required to make a man perfect, and you will find it all in Christ. "For ye are complete in him." "Christ is all." Suppose, beloved, that our Lord Jesus were not perfect as a Saviour, what then? Could any of us make up the deficiency? What is there of ours that we could bring to him? If his robe of righteousness were not finished, would any of our filthy rags be fit to be joined to his cloth of gold? If that fountain were not full and efficacious for cleansing, what would you pour into it? What could you contribute but your own pollution? What help could that be? Dream of yoking a gnat with an archangel, and then imagine that you can help your Lord in the work of salvation. Shall a creeping worm be needed to complete the work of him who made the world? What wild nonsense is this! Must the Son of God be helped by sinners dead in sin? O man, if Jesus is not able to save you from first to last you are a lost man, for neither yourself, nor priest, nor pope, can bring anything to the Lord but dross and dung, and shall this be added to that most fine gold tried in the fire, with which Christ redeems the souls of men? At this moment I speak personally my own confidence, I have no hope of being saved if Jesus is not the whole of my salvation. I trust him *in* everything and *for* everything, and I solemnly warn any here who are trusting a little in Christ, and also somewhat in themselves, that their hope will be vain. Jesus must be everything or nothing. If we take Christ we must take the whole of Christ; there must be no picking or choosing. We must have all of Christ and he must be all our salvation and all our desire. What doth hinder? Surely we delight to do this at once.

II. We leave our first head for you to think upon and turn to the second. CHRIST IS TO BE TAKEN UP INTO OUR ARMS AND TO BE LOOKED AT. I am quite sure that when Simeon took Christ up into his arms, although that was a physical action, yet there was a spiritual action underneath it: it was in his heart that he took up our Lord. And when his natural eyes saw Christ he beheld him also with the eyes of his soul; of this we are sure, for if the mere sight of Christ with his eyes had been

so pleasing to Simeon he would have said, "Lord, let thy servant never go away, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation: let me therefore stay here and always see him." But spiritual was the sight, and therefore he, though he had known Christ after the flesh, henceforth did not desire to know even him any more, but was willing to depart to the realm of pure spirits, for which that sight had prepared him. Now, will you try and picture Simeon taking up Christ that you may do the same? He no sooner saw him than, asking nobody's leave, he uplifted the blessed babe in his own arms. That was a *grasp of faith* and its meaning was, "He is mine: I take him to be my salvation." For himself he embraced the incarnate Lord, and he was not ashamed to avow his faith in the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of Jerusalem. It had been revealed to him that he should not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ, and now he openly avows that this is the Christ, the consolation of Israel. Dear hearers, can you not put forth your arms this morning and take up my Lord to be your own for ever. There is nobody to forbid you; nay, many are inviting you. Take him now and happy be. Does your heart say, "Yes, he shall be mine"? Then delay not to claim him. What a mercy it is that Jesus could be taken up in the arms and salvation thus be held in men's hands! He that in the beginning was with God, and is indeed God himself, nevertheless can be taken up in the arms of faith: a whole Christ can be held in an old man's feeble arms. O that other aged men would come and take him. Yea, and young men too, and women also. Would God that thousands of every age and sex would now confess the Lord Jesus to be their salvation. God help *you* so to do at once.

Simeon held that babe in the *grasp of love* as well as of faith, for I am sure the old man pressed the babe to his bosom and looked most fondly upon him as he said, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation." He could not have held it out at arm's length, that would have been impossible in such a case, but he felt that he at length saw the dearest object of his desires and so he clasped him to his bosom. Come, let us one by one do the same. "My Jesus, my salvation, thou art all mine, and I love thee. The heaven of heavens cannot contain thee, and yet I hold thee. Thou fillest all worlds, and yet I have thee, all my own, the beloved of my soul for ever." What an armful that aged saint had obtained. Did ever human arm hold a burden more precious, a treasure more desirable? Come, then, brothers and sisters, say, "Christ shall be mine this morning, all mine and for ever mine; by faith I take him to be my very own." God help you by his Holy Spirit to give your Lord such an embrace.

While he was thus holding the child in his arms he gazed upon him with intense delight. I know he did, for he said, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation." With what wondering pleasure and reverence he looked into that dear face, and marked those altogether lovely features. Doubtless he looked, and looked, and looked, and looked, and looked again: he could scarcely bear to lift his eyes. So must you do with Christ. First, take him to be yours, and then let your eyes be riveted upon him. Never let your thoughts forsake this choicest of all subjects for godly meditation.

Think much of him who is the whole of your salvation, and embrace

him in that respect. Alas, there are some Christians who never think of Jesus in that way. There is a certain creed which tells you you may be saved to-day and lost to-morrow. No believer has obtained eternal salvation according to that theory, but only a temporary and possible salvation. On that theory there is no seeing the whole of God's salvation as soon as you see Jesus, you only see a bare hope of it; but we know that whosoever believeth in Jesus is saved, and therefore we assert that Christ is salvation, and he that hath him is saved. Christ's words are, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand;" and he who knows the meaning of these words rejoices that he has the whole of salvation in his arms, and he may look at it as long as he lives, and never cease to look, for it is worthy of life-long admiration.

I like the thought of Simeon being an old man, and taking the infant Jesus in his arms. I have a hope that one of these days, by God's mercy, this poor old world of ours, which has come to her dotage and decay, may be led by sovereign grace to embrace Jesus the ever new. Then will the millennium dawn, and the world may then pray for the last conflagration to end her sorrowful history, saying, "Now let this globe depart in peace, for it has seen thy salvation."

But, to drop all figurative speech, it is a great blessing to the aged man to have Jesus in his arms. Though he shall be compelled by the infirmities of age to ask with Barzillai, "Can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink?" Yet he shall find great sweetness in the bread of heaven, and the name of Jesus shall be as wines on the lees well refined. If, through age and infirmity, he can hear no more the voice of singing men and singing women, he that hath Christ hath music in his heart for ever. In old age Solomon tells us that the grasshopper is a burden, but this child is none. Then the sun, and the light, and the moon, and the stars are darkened, but this child giveth light to all who see him. Then the keepers of the house do tremble, but they are strengthened as they hold the Lord: then they that look out of the windows are darkened, but they are bright when they gaze upon the Saviour. The doors are shut in the streets, but no door shuts out the Lord Jesus; the voice of the bird awakens the light sleeper, but no sound shall break the repose of those who rest in Jesus. With the aged desire fails, but not with the aged saint, for he seeth in Christ Jesus all his desires fulfilled; and though man goeth to his long home, he that hath the holy child Jesus to go with him may even long for the journey, saying, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace." Mourners may go about the streets of earth, but he who has seen in Christ the salvation of God ascendeth to other streets, where sorrow and sighing are fled away. Thrice blessed old age which thus renews its youth with Christ Jesus.

III. That brings us to our last point, upon which we have no time

for more than a few words. **WHEN CHRIST IS TAKEN UP INTO THE ARMS AND LOOKED UPON HE HAS A WONDERFUL EFFECT.** Notice the case before us. First, *writing is ended*. Simeon had been waiting for the consolation of Israel, but he could now say, "Lord, what wait I for?" We, too, had been waiting, and wishing, and longing, and pining, but when we found our Lord we no longer waited, but we could each one say, "I want nothing, I wish for nothing, I long for nothing, I pine for nothing. 'Mine eyes have seen thy salvation.' " Now, also, Simeon was *excited to praise* the Lord. He took him up in his arms and blessed God. None can bless God like those who have Christ in their arms. I do not know that Simeon had ever been a poet before, but he began to pour out his swan song, his last, sweetest, and perhaps his only hymn. Every line is full of exultation and delight. Simeon soon had a song in his mouth when he had Christ in his arms. Then shall the tongue of the dumb sing. The very stones would cry out if a man could see God's salvation and yet be silent. Those who could never speak six words before have grown eloquent when Christ Jesus has been their theme. He is my God, and I will praise him; he is my father's God, and I will extol him.

And now that he has seen the Lord's Christ, notice the effect upon his eyes; *he desires to close them upon all else*. I have heard of some who have looked on the sun unadvisedly till they could not see anything else; but this I know, that he who looks on Christ becomes blind to all rival attractions. If these eyes have once seen the salvation of God it looks like sacrilege to set them upon the base things of time and sense. Let the gate be closed through which Jesus has entered; it seems profane to allow a single object belonging to this traitorous world to enter our mind by eye-gate any more. Having eaten the white bread of heaven, we want no more of the husks of earth: having had a glimpse of the incarnate God, what is there more to see?

His eyes had seen Christ, and what then? Why, now they were *prepared to look on death*. He had been told he should not see death till he had seen the Lord's Christ, and now he is ready to see his final hour and all of gloom which may attend departure. He says, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart"; he regards it not as dying, but as going from the present scene to a more glorious country. If you have ever looked Christ in the face the king of terrors has lost his terror, and instead of being a king has become your servant. We may well long for the time when we shall have done with earth, and be shut in with our Beloved. The proverb is, "See Naples and die," but we may much improve upon it, and say, "See Christ and never die," but be quite content to depart and to be with him.

Lastly, that sight of course had made Simeon's eyes *ready to behold the glory of God*. I suppose if we could be taken up just as we are into heaven, if we were unrenewed men and women, we should not be able

to see the glory of God for lack of spiritual eyes. We must first look at Christ, and when our eyes have been brightened and strengthened by the mild splendours of incarnate deity, they will be fitted to behold the King himself as he sits upon the throne. At any rate, when some of us have had a sight of Christ we have wondered what more we could see in heaven. When Solomon's Song has come to be our every-day talk, and the Beloved has made us to feel that his left hand is under our head while his right hand doth embrace us, we have almost thought we would not give a pin to change earth for heaven, for whether in the body or out of the body we could not tell, but this we knew, we could sing, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his; he feedeth among the lilies." If your soul once comes there, and if the Lord helps you to continue there, then dying will be nothing more than crossing the threshold, and going from the doorstep of the King's palace to the interior of its halls. Some believers dwell in the suburbs of the celestial city, and small will be their change when, in a little while, they shall enter the central golden streets thereof, where the sun shall no more go down, neither shall the Lord withdraw himself. The Lord give you to find all your salvation in Christ, and may he teach you a great deal more than these poor stammering lips can ever tell to you. May Christ Jesus our Lord be every day more near and dear to me and to you. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Luke ii. 8—52.

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THE HOLD FAST.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 9TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Take fast hold of instruction ; let her not go : keep her ; for she is thy life."—
Proverbs iv. 18.

FAITH may be well described as taking hold upon divine instruction. God has condescended to teach us, and it is ours to hear with attention and receive his words ; and while we are hearing faith comes, even that faith which saves the soul. To take "fast hold" is an exhortation which concerns the strength, the reality, the heartiness, and the truthfulness of faith, and the more of these the better. If to take hold is good, to take *fast* hold is better. Even a touch of the hem of Christ's garment causeth healing to come to us, but if we want the full riches which are treasured up in Christ, we must not only touch but take hold ; and if we would know from day to day to the very uttermost all the fulness of his grace, we must take *fast* hold, and so maintain a constant and close connection between our souls and the eternal fountain of life. It were well to give such a grip as a man gives to a plank when he seizes hold upon it for his very life—that is a fast hold indeed.

We are to take fast hold of instruction, and the best of instruction is that which comes from God ; the truest wisdom is the revelation of God in Christ Jesus : of that, therefore, we are to take fast hold. The best understanding is obedience to the will of God and a diligent learning of those saving truths which God has set before us in his word : so that in effect we are exhorted to take hold of Christ Jesus our Lord, the incarnate wisdom in whom dwelleth all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. We are not to let him go, but to keep him and hold him, for he is our life. Does not John in his gospel tell us that the Word is our light or instruction and at the same time our life ? "In him was life, and the life was the light of men." The more we abide in the Lord Jesus, and the more firmly we take hold upon him, the better will it be for us in a thousand ways. I intend at this time to speak as the Holy Spirit shall enable me, upon this fast-hold ; and I reckon that the subject is one of the most important which can occupy your attention at this particular crisis in
No. 1,418.

the history of the church. Many there be around us who believe in Christ, but it is with a very trembling faith, and their hold is unsteady; we need to have among us men of tighter grip, who really believe what they profess to believe, who know the truth in its living power, and are persuaded of its certainty, so that they cannot by any means be moved from their steadfastness. Among the vacillating crowd we long to see fast-holders who are pillars in the house of our God, whose grasp of divine truth is not that of babes or boys, but of men full grown and vigorous.

We shall handle our subject by speaking, first, upon *the method* by which we may take fast hold; then upon *the difficulties* which will lie in our way in so doing; thirdly, upon *the benefits* of such a firm grasp; and lastly, upon *the arguments* for our fast holding mentioned in the text.

I. First, then, **THE METHOD** of taking fast hold upon true religion, upon the gospel, upon Christ, in fact.

At the outset, my brethren, much must depend upon the *intense decision* which a man feels in his soul with regard to eternal things. If he intends trifling he will trifle, but if he means taking fast hold he will, by God's grace, do so. Under God, this, in many cases, depends very much upon a man's individuality and force of character. Some men are naturally thorough and whole-hearted in all things upon which they enter, whether of this world or the next. When they serve the devil they are amongst his life guards, and they rush to the front in all kinds of iniquity. Among sinners they become the chief, for they have no fear, and no hesitancy; they are daredevils, defying both God and man, sinning greedily with both hands. Such men, when converted, often become eminent saints, being just as thorough and resolute in their following after God as they were in the pursuit of evil; they are determined to vindicate his holy cause and spread abroad the knowledge of his love. I must confess an earnest longing that many such may be brought into the church of Christ at this time to brace her up and inspire her with new energy. Many in our churches appear to have no depth of earth; with joy they receive the word, from the very fact that they are so shallow, but as soon as the sun ariseth with burning heat it is discovered that they have no root, for they wither away. Others are truly religious, and probably will remain so, but they are not zealous; in fact, they are not intense about anything, but are lukewarm, weak, and unstable. These are mere chips in the porridge, neither souring nor sweetening: they give forth no flavour, but they take the flavour of that which surrounds them; they are the creatures of circumstances, not helmsmen who avail themselves of stream and tide, but mere drift-wood carried along by any and every current which may take hold on them. They have no fulness of manhood about them, they are mere children; they resemble the sapling which can be bent and twisted, and not the oak which defies the storm. There are certain persons of this sort who in other matters have purpose enough, and strength of mind enough, but when they touch the things of God they are loose, flimsy, superficial, half-hearted. You see them earnest enough in hunting after wealth, but they show no such zeal in the pursuit of godliness. The force of their character comes out in a political debate, in the making of a bargain, in the arrangement of a social gathering, but you never see it in the work of the Lord. The

young man comes to the front as a volunteer, or as a member of a club, or in the house of business, but who ever hears of him in the Sabbath school, the prayer-meeting, or the home-mission? In the things of God such persons owe any measure of progress which they make to the influence of their fellows, who bear them along as so much dead weight, they themselves never throwing enough weight into the matter to add a single half-ounce of spiritual power to the church. Now, all this is mischievous and wrong.

My dear friends, we must all confess that if the religion of Christ be true, it deserves that we should give our whole selves to it. If it be a lie, let it be scouted from creation; but if it be true, it is a matter concerning which we cannot be neutral or lukewarm, for it demands our soul, our life, our all, and its claim cannot be denied. There must be a determination wrought in our souls by the Holy Spirit to be upright and downright in the work of the Lord, or else we shall be little worth.

We come, however, to closer matters of fact when we observe next that our taking fast hold of the things of God must depend upon *the thoroughness of our conversion*. In this church we try, as far as we can, in receiving church-members, to receive none but those who give clear evidence of a change of heart; but this evidence can be imitated so skillfully that the best examination and the most earnest judgment cannot prevent self-deceived persons from making a profession of religion. This we cannot help, but woe to those who wilfully deceive. Many exhibit flowers and fruits which never grew in their own gardens; their experience is borrowed, and does not spring from the essential root of the Holy Ghost's work within their souls: this is sad indeed. Our condition before God is a personal matter, and can never be settled by the judgment of our fellows, for what can others know of the workings of our hearts? Each man must judge himself and examine himself, for whatever a church may attempt in its zeal for purity, it can never take the responsibility of his own sincerity from any man. We do not pretend to give certificates of salvation, and if we did they would be worthless; you must yourselves know the Lord and be really converted, or else your profession is a forgery and you yourselves are counterfeits. If a man shall in after life hold fast the things of God he must be soundly converted at first. Very much of his after life depends upon the thoroughness of his beginning. There must at the very first be a deep sense of sin, a consciousness of guilt, a holy horror of evil, or he will never make much of a Christian. I do not say that all or even any of those doubts and temptations and satanic suggestions, which some have had to struggle with, are necessary to make a true conversion; but I must confess that I am not at all displeased when I meet with a good deal of battling and struggling in the experience of the newly awakened. It is not pleasant for them, but we hope it will be profitable. Those whose souls are ploughed and ploughed and ploughed again before the seed is sown upon them often yield the best crop. John Bunyan's "Grace Abounding" very much accounts for John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress." If it had not been for his terrible conflicts of soul he might not have known how to hold fast his confidence when shut up for twelve years in prison, nor would he have seen visions of the celestial city when all around him was as the valley of the shadow of death. I do

not wish to see seeking souls distressed by Satan, but I do press for this,—that there shall be an end of self-trust, a total destruction of self-righteousness, a complete giving up of all legal and carnal hopes, or else the conversion will be a mere show, and he who is the subject of it will be like Ephraim, a silly dove without heart. Unless repentance of sin is real in you, you will never take fast hold of the truth of God.

And there must be, dear friends, a very sincere laying hold upon Christ Jesus. If you have any doubt about the doctrine of atonement, I do not wonder if your religion soon wears into shreds. No, you must without question accept the substitutionary sacrifice; your soul must feel that the precious blood is her only hope, that this, and this alone, can make her clean before the living God. You must fly to Christ in desperation, and cling to him as all your salvation and all your desire; there must be no hesitancy here. At the very outset of the Christian life these two things should be very distinct with you,—sin which has ruined you, and Christ who has saved you. Make a muddle at first and your life will be a tangle. Some tradesmen never carry on their business well, they evidently do not more than half understand it, and are mere bunglers. Now, if you come to enquire, you will find that they were never thoroughly grounded in their calling; either they never served an apprenticeship, or else they were lazy lads and never became masters of their trade, and this bad commencement sticks to them all their lives. It is the same with the higher learning. A man may go a long way in the classics, but if he was not grounded in the grammar he will be everlastingly making mistakes which a sound scholar will soon discover. Every teacher must work hard at the elements if his pupils are to succeed. Whatever you do with the higher forms, do teach that little boy his grammar, ground him in the rudiments, or he will be injured for life. To borrow another illustration, we have heard of a bridge which spanned a stream, and for some years stood well enough, but by-and-by, through the force of the current, it began to show signs of giving way. When it came to be examined it was soon seen that the builders never went deep enough with the foundations. There is the mischief of thousands of other things besides bridges. We must have good and deep foundations, or otherwise the higher we build the sooner the fabric will fall. Look at many of the wretched houses in the streets around us, they are the disgrace of the city; you will see settlements and cracks everywhere, because of bad foundations and bad materials. The same is true in the characters of many professed Christians, for want of a good commencement you can see flaws and cracks innumerable, and you wonder that they do not come down in sudden ruin. So indeed they would, but, like those wretched houses, they hold one another up. Many professors only keep upright because they stand in a row, and derive support from their associations. I wish we could see more Christian men of the sort who dare to stand alone, like those old family mansions which stand each one in its own garden, so well built that when we begin to take them down each brick is found to be solid as granite, and the mortar is as hard as a rock. Such buildings and such men become every day more rare, but we must come back to the old style, and the sooner the better. Those of you who are yet in the early days of your piety should see to this. See that you are right, and sound, and thorough,

and take fast hold of truth in the days of your first love, or yours will be but a sickly life in years to come.

This being taken for granted, the next help to a fast hold of Christ is *heartly discipleship*. Brethren, as soon as you are converted you become the disciples of Jesus, and if you are to become fast-holding Christians you must acknowledge him to be your Master, Teacher, and Lord in all things, and resolve to be good scholars in his school. He will be the best Christian who has Christ for his Master, and truly follows him. Some are disciples of the church, others are disciples of the minister, and a third sort are disciples of their own thoughts; he is the wise man who sits at Jesus' feet and learns of him, with the resolve to follow his teaching and imitate his example. He who tries to learn of Jesus himself, taking the very words from the Lord's own lips, binding himself to believe whatsoever the Lord hath taught and to do whatsoever he hath commanded—he, I say, is the stable Christian. Follow Jesus, my brethren, and not the church, for our Lord has never said to his disciples, "Follow your brethren," but he has said "Follow me." He has not said, "Abide by the denominational confession," but he has said, "Abide in me." Nothing must come in between our souls and our Lord. What if fidelity to Jesus should sometimes lead us to differ from our brethren? What matters it so long as we do not differ from our Master? Crochets and quibbles are evil things, but a keenly sensitive conscientiousness is invaluable. Be true disciples of Christ, and let his least word be precious to you. Remember that if a man love him he will keep his words; and he hath said, "He that shall break one of the least of these my commandments and shall teach men so, the same shall be least in the kingdom of heaven." Shun all compromises and abatements of truth, but be thorough and determined, holding fast your Saviour's words. Follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. If such be your resolve, by the grace of God, you will take fast hold of instruction and will never let it go.

It will much help you to this if in the next place you have *a studious consideration of the Word of God*, and meditate much upon the truth which you have received. There is too little studying of the Scriptures nowadays, I am persuaded. Books, magazines, papers, and the like bury the Bible under heaps of rubbish; but he who means to be a man of God to the fulness of his manhood will feed upon the word of God at first hand. Like the Bereans, he will be of a noble spirit, and he will search the Scriptures daily. "I want," saith he, "to obtain my creed, not at second hand from others, but directly for myself from the very word of God itself—the pure well of gospel undefiled." This is a very important point. I have heard often of late a misused expression,—“I do my own thinking:” let us correct it and then adopt it by saying, “I do my own searching of the word of God.” Remember, we are not called to think out a new gospel, as some imagine, but we are called to be thinkers upon the old gospel, that we may know and understand its principles and its bearings, and become confirmed in the belief of it. We need to think over the word till we are thoroughly imbued with it. The silk of certain insects takes its colour from the leaves on which they feed, and a Christian man's life will always take its colour from that which his soul feeds upon. Oh, to live upon the word of God, even upon the deep

things of God, for so shall we be rooted and grounded in the faith, and shall take fast hold of eternal wisdom.

An established Christian is one who not only knows the doctrine, but who also knows the authority for it, having looked around it and pondered it in his heart. By careful meditation he is taught in the truth, and is able to give a reason for the hope that is in him with meekness and fear. Nor is he merely a man of the letter; his study in the power of the Holy Spirit has carried him into the essence of the word. He has asked the Spirit of God to make him *acquainted* with divine truth, so that he has not only read *of* it, but he has communed *with* it, and now he lives upon it, eats it, drinks it, receives it into the inward parts of his soul, and retains it there as a living and incorruptible seed. Now a man who does this year after year is the kind of man who, by God's grace, will take fast hold of instruction, and will prove a faithful witness for his Lord.

Add to this also an *earnest seriousness of character*, and you go a long way towards maintaining a fast hold of Christ. We do not mean by this that we are to dismiss cheerfulness—the Lord give us more of it, for it is as oil to the wheels, and is a high recommendation of religion to the unconverted. There are some who are a deal too *gloomy* in their religion, and seem to think that the grace of God is never displayed by them unless they are sullen and doleful. But at the same time there is a flippancy which is not commendable, and a levity which is far apart from the mind of Christ. Christian life is not child's play; we, above all men, ought to make our lives sublime, and not ridiculous. We are not called into this world to trifle away the hours and kill time in doing nothing; for this life links itself to eternity, and that eternity, in spite of all that is said to the contrary, will be one of endless misery or of endless joy; it is, therefore, no small thing to possess an immortal mind and to be responsible before God. Sin is no trifle, pardon is no trifle, and condemnation is no trifle. Eternal life is precious beyond all things, and to lie under the wrath of God is dreadful beyond conception. I love to see, especially in young Christians, with regard to the things of God, deep seriousness of purpose and spirit, showing that they feel it to be a weighty thing to be a Christian, and that they cannot afford to have their Christianity put under the shadow of suspicion, nor dare they even appear to be mere players upon a stage, for they fear and tremble at his word.

Now, if all these things be in you and abound, there will grow around them an *experimental verification of the things of God*. I mean that you will not only read of the love of God, but you will feel it from day to day, and so be assured of it. You read in the Scriptures of the power of sin, and you believe what you read, but to this will be added the confirmatory fact that you feel it in your members, and therefore cannot doubt it. You read of the efficacy of the precious blood of Jesus; but you do more, for you feel its cleansing power upon your heart, and its consoling influence over your conscience, and so you are established in the blessed truth. We hardly know anything till we have lived it. You must get truth burnt into you with the hot iron of experience, or you will forget it. I believe that the pains and griefs and afflictions of many of God's children have been absolutely necessary to establish them in the faith; and I can only hope that you who are the children of joy may derive as much benefit

from your gladness as mourners have found in their sorrows : it might be so, and should be so, but I fear it seldom is. The whole of our life should be a daily testing of the gospel, and a continuous verification of the eternal truth thereof. Our life should agree with this Book of life : just as the book of nature, being written by the same author as the book of revelation, shows the same hand and style ; so the book of the new creation within us, being inscribed by the same Spirit who has written these Scriptures, will display the same style and manner ; and we shall thus be growingly assured of the things which are verily revealed to us of God. Go on, dear friends, and may the Lord grant that whatever your experience may be, whether it shall abound in bitterness or in sweetness, the testimony of God may be confirmed in you, and your grip of it may be intensified by every year's experience.

I must add one other word. I believe that in the mode of taking fast hold upon the gospel *practical Christianity* has a great influence ; I refer especially to practical usefulness. Some members enter the church and never do a hand's turn. We have the distinguished privilege of seeing them sit in their pews, and that is all we know about them. We cannot bring them under church censure, for they are punctual in religious observances ; but they are barren boughs. Give me the young man who, when he joins the church, says, "I shall take a little time to study the gospel till I know more of it by the teaching of God's Spirit ;" and then, having done so, says, "I have not learned this for myself. There is something for me to do in connection with the church of God, and I am determined to find out what it is and to do it." You see such a young believer going to the Sabbath school, or you find him beginning to speak in a cottage, or becoming a visitor, and seeking to speak personally to individuals about their souls. If he be a man of the right kind his work will be another holdfast to his mind. Look at him, how he keeps to the gospel : how he clings to the old, old truth. He is not the man to run after new theories and modern doubts, for he is helped to keep right by his practical connection with spiritual disease and its remedy. Go into the back slums of London and see if you will doubt the doctrine of human depravity. Oh no, it is your ladies and gentlemen that wear lavender kid gloves who doubt that doctrine. Try to rescue a harlot from her sin, and if you are enabled to lead her to Jesus you cannot doubt the power of the precious blood of Jesus to cleanse the heart. Not those who battle with vice, but those who practise it themselves, are found cavilling at the doctrine of atonement. Those who are busy plucking brands out of the fire are little given to speculation, but are firm abiders in the gospel. I think there are few exceptions to the rule that the "advanced thought" gentlemen are not engaged in practical work for the salvation of souls. They are grand talkers, but very poor workers. I am not hypercritical when I say that if you will mention a "modern thought" professor it will generally turn out that he is not worth his salt as to practical usefulness : not he ; he has the parrot-faculty of pulling things to pieces, but what positive work has he ever done ? He may be a distinguished dignitary or a noble scholar, but as to actually grappling with the hearts and consciences of men, and entering into the dark and troublous experience of tempted souls, he is quite at sea, for he knows nothing about it. He would talk after another fashion if his hand had ever been laid to hard

work among sinful men and afflicted consciences. I tell you, sirs, that to argue with a poor distressed conscience and to try to bring it to peace in Christ soon lets you know the truth of the gospel. To stand by a dying bed and hear the holy triumph of even the most illiterate of the children of God, or what is equally efficacious, to watch the last sad hours of an impenitent sinner dying without hope, will make you know that there is a world to come, joyful or terrible as the case may be; and you will also learn that sin is a great evil, and that the atonement is a great reality. Young convert, if you want to be one of the firm holders of the gospel, you must get to work as well as to study, for this by the overruling power of the Holy Ghost will strengthen you in the faith of God's elect. Thus I have brought forward the method, may it prove to be instructive.

II. Very briefly, I want now to show THE DIFFICULTIES of taking fast hold of instruction, and every difficulty I mention will tend to show all the more clearly the necessity of it.

The first difficulty is that *this is the age of questioning*. Everybody questions now. Our friends over in Germany have pushed the questioning business to the furthest point, and in their thorough way they have produced its legitimate fruit in cold-blooded attempts to murder a venerable monarch. Professed ministers of the gospel have taught the German mind to doubt everything, and now the basis of society is shaken, and law and order are undermined. What could they expect otherwise? He who does not fear God is not likely to honour the king. When men give up their Bibles they will care but little for human laws. We have plenty of the like evil leaven in England, and certain clergymen and dissenting divines are spreading it with hideous industry. Young gentlemen whose whiskers have not yet developed are authoritatively deciding that nothing can be decided, and dogmatically denouncing all dogmas. We meet them every day, and we notice that in proportion to their ignorance is their confidence in sneering at every holy thing. According to them nobody is sincere, nothing is sacred. These great men, who would never have been heard of if they had not been heretical, know better by far than God himself. As for apostles and prophets, they are just nothing at all to these infallibles; their own "thought" is more precious than inspiration itself. This conceited scepticism is in the air; everywhere it seems to be abroad, and you cannot help encountering it; therefore let us be the more earnest to hold fast the faith.

Worse than this, *this is an age of worldliness*. Everybody wants to be rich, and nobody is rich now at the point at which his forefathers were content to stop. Our good old deacons and respected church members were content with very moderate incomes, they were satisfied and happy with thrift and prudence, and would have been deeply grieved with the extravagance which is seen on all sides at this time. They not only considered their shops and their fields, but they planned to have time to look after the Sunday-schools in which they were proud to serve, and the prayer-meetings which they delighted to attend. But, dear me, prayer-meetings, lectures, sermons, Sunday-schools, these are all despised now! If a man can make an extra guinea or two, by putting himself where they are out of the question, he jumps at the chance. We must be rich, we must cut a dash, we must spend more than our neighbours,

and for this the work of the church may go to the dogs. Oh for a few simple, earnest Christians who will judge their Lord and his cause to be worth some consideration, and will lay themselves out to serve his church. When worldliness is so predominant it becomes so much the harder to take fast hold of eternal things. One needs to hear the word, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you," for unless we do hear it we shall be tempted to take fast hold on the world, and let the things of eternity slip by us.

Then, besides, there is and always has been *a great desire for novelty*. We are all the subjects of it: we all like something fresh. But there are some who are sick of the changeable disease; you see them zealots for a creed to-day, but on a sudden you find them deeply immersed in the opposite teaching. Ah, now they have found out something very wonderful: just as the idiot who saw the rainbow, and believed that there was a jewel at the foot of it, ran for miles to seize a glittering sapphire and grasped a piece of glass bottle; so do they for ever pursue and never attain. We have a few of these gentlemen in most of our churches, but you will find them nowhere long. Another inventor starts a new system, and away they go, pining always to be the first disciples of each new prophet. May God save us from the Athenian spirit, which for ever hungers for something new.

Another difficulty, and the worst of all, is *the corruption of our own hearts*. "Take fast hold of instruction," says the text. "Why," I hear a brother say, "my dear sir, sometimes it is as much as I can do to take hold of it at all. I have to question whether I have been converted. I go down into such depths of despondency, that unless the truth holds me, I shall never hold it." Well, but I hope this is all a means of helping you to hold it all the more firmly. You now see that salvation must be by grace from first to last. By this very process you will be compelled to hold the doctrines of grace the more intensely, because you are made to see how utterly unable you are, in and of yourselves, to think a good thought, much less to remain steadfast in the whole truth of Christ.

And then there is *Satan*, too; how busy he is in trying to undermine the fundamentals of the faith! Has he not suggested to some of us all kind of doubts? Yes. I said to a man one day, who had uttered some blasphemy in my presence against a certain truth, "You think you stagger me! My dear man, I have had more doubts pass through my thoughts a great deal than you could tell me, or fifty like you." The doubts which the devil insinuates into the minds of the people of God are at times quite as horrible as any which a Voltaire or a Tom Paine was ever able to invent, and yet by God's grace we have not given up the gospel, nor shall we though heaven and earth shall pass away. Because we are one with Christ we shall live in the truth of Christ, for he will keep and preserve us even to the end.

III. Thirdly, let us consider THE BENEFITS of taking fast hold. I wish I had an hour in which to dilate upon the benefit of so doing, but I must briefly say that it *gives stability* to the Christian character to have a firm grip of the gospel. Men who take fast hold are the backbone of a church. All through the dark reign of moderatism in Scotland, who kept up the testimony for truth? Why, those solid Christians who were known as "the men" who held the faith and walked with God in the

power of it. These were men much in prayer and much in meditation, who lived on when all sound teaching had left the pulpits, because their souls were sustained by secret communion with God on the hill-side. When the time came for pure truth to revive in Scotland, these men came to the front and were honoured as the men who had kept the flame alive in the land. What was it delivered our country in still earlier times from being altogether under the hoof of Rome? When prelates forsook Christ, and preachers by hundreds in Mary's day turned from Protestantism to Popery, the true faith lived on in the hearts of poor men and women, weavers and cobblers, who believed what they did believe, and could not deny the truth. Everybody in the parish knew that they were "stubborn heretics," who could not be frightened or argued down. They knew, they were sure, they were confident, and therefore they spoke. It did not matter to them that they were in a minority, for they knew that a minority of one on God's side is a majority. "I Athanasius against the world," said that grand old confessor, when they told him everybody had gone over to Arianism, and that nobody believed in the deity of Christ. "The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved, I bear up the pillars of it," said one of old; and happy is that man to whom such an office is given.

A firm grip of the gospel will give you *strength for service*. The man who can "hold the fort" at one time is the very man who can capture a fort at another time. He who can stand well can march well. The hand of the church is made of the same material as its backbone. It is of no use sending poor hesitating professors into the field of holy labour. If you hardly know what you believe, how can you teach other people? But when the truth is written upon your very soul, and graven as with the point of a diamond upon your heart, you will speak with confidence; and there will be a power about your utterances which none shall be able to withstand or gainsay. For the sake, then, of your spiritual strength I press the exhortation of the text, "Take fast hold of instruction."

And this, too, will bring you *joy*. The outskirts of our Jerusalem are dreary; her glory lies within. Where shines the brightest light? It is in the holy of holies, in the innermost shrine. The skin and husks of religion are poor things, but the juice, the life, the vital power of religion,—therein lies the sweetness. You must not be satisfied with the "name to live"; it will never comfort you, it will even distress you. The life of Christ mightily developed in you must be the joy of your heart. Multitudes of Christian professors get next to nothing out of Christianity. How can they? They hold their religion as some rich farmers hold "off-hand farms." Nobody ever makes anything out of off-hand farms: the man who makes farming pay lives on the spot, and gives his whole time and energy to it. So is it in the things of God: if you make your minister your bailiff in religion you will get nothing out of it; you must live in it and upon it, and then you will prosper. I want you to say, "If there be anything in godliness I am going to know it; if prayer has power I am going to pray; if there be such a thing as communion with God I will enjoy it; if there be such a thing as likeness to Christ I will obtain it. Godliness shall not be an addition to my life, but it shall be my life itself." Ah, brother, you are the man of the shining countenance,

you are the man of the sparkling eye; you drink deep, and you find that the deeper you drink the sweeter the draught becomes.

Lastly, with regard to this summary of benefits;—persons of this kind are *the very glory of the church*, they are the persons in whom true religion displays its brightest beams. They may be humble cottagers, or obscure members of a large church who are scarcely known, but those who live with them, those who are at all acquainted with them, say of them, “These men are a credit to the church, and an honour to the name of Christianity.” Not your frothy talkers, not your flimsy professors, but your deep taught, grace-instructed men and women, these are they who are the beauty of the church and the glory of Christ. I would to God we had many more such. I look around and see that the cause does not prosper as I could wish throughout the land, and then I recollect in one spot an earnest village preacher, in another a holy laborious deacon, in a third a gracious woman, zealous in every good work, and I am comforted. Thank God, there is life in the old church yet. There is hope for her yet because of her fast-holding people. If I study the statistics of the churches, I have to say, “What is the good of these figures? Probably a church of two hundred members might be cut down to twenty earnest effectives.” For my part, I would sooner stand on this platform with twelve holy men and women to back me up than with twelve thousand mere pretenders to religion such as can be found in crowds anywhere. No, it is the fast grip of faith, it is vital godliness which makes a man to be a real power in the church.

IV. Now, lastly, I have to mention THE ARGUMENTS of the text, which are three. All through the sermon I have been using argument, therefore I shall be the more brief and draw to a close.

The first argument is, take fast hold of true religion, because it is *your best friend*. Read the text: “Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go.” You cannot find your way to heaven without this guide, therefore do not suffer it to leave you. Do as Moses did, who when his father-in-law, Hobab, was with him, would not suffer him to depart, “for,” he said, “thou shalt be to us instead of eyes, for thou knowest where to encamp in the wilderness.” As Moses kept Hobab, so do you keep the faith, for you cannot find your road except by holding the true gospel with a true heart. What a sweet companion the gospel is! How often it has cheered you! How easy has the road become while you have been in intercourse with it. Do you what the disciples at Emmaus did when Jesus talked with them: they constrained him, saying, “Abide with us.” Do not let him go; you will be a lonely pilgrim if you do. No, if you could be led by an angel, but must lose the presence of your God, you would be wise to cry out against such an evil, and like Moses plead: “If thy Spirit go not with us, carry us not up hence.”

The next argument is that true godliness should be held fast, for it is *your treasure*. “Keep it,” says our text. It is your best inheritance at the present moment, and it is to be your eternal inheritance: keep it, then. Let everything else go, but do not part with a particle of truth. The slightest fragment of truth is more valuable than a diamond. Hold it then with all firmness. You are so much the richer by every truth you know; you will be so much the poorer by every truth you forget. Hold it

then, and hide it in your heart. A certain king who had a rare diamond sent it to a foreign court, entrusting it to a very faithful servant. This servant was attacked, however, on the road by a band of robbers, and, as they could not find the diamond, they drew their swords and killed him. He was found dead, but his master exclaimed, "He has not lost the diamond, I am sure!" He judged truly, for the trusty servant had swallowed the gem and so preserved it with his life. We also should thus place the truth in our inward parts, and then we shall never be deprived of it. A priest took a Testament from an Irish boy. "But," cried the boy, "you cannot take away those six chapters of Matthew that I learned by heart." They may take away our books, but they cannot take away what we have fed upon and made our own. "His flesh is meat indeed, his blood is drink indeed," for when we have fed upon him our Lord Jesus remains in us the hope of glory. Hold fast the truth, O believers in Jesus, for it is your treasure.

Lastly, *it is your "life."* Mr. Arnot, in his very beautiful book upon the Proverbs, tells a story to illustrate this text. He says that in the Southern seas an American vessel was attacked by a wounded whale. The huge monster ran out for the length of a mile from the ship, and then turned round, and with the whole force of its acquired speed struck the ship and made it leak at every timber, so as to begin to go down. The sailors got out all their boats, filled them as quickly as they could with the necessaries of life, and began to pull away from the ship. Just then two strong men might be seen leaping into the water who swam to the vessel, leaped on board, disappeared for a moment, and then came up, bringing something in their hands. Just as they sprang into the sea down went the vessel, and they were carried round in the vortex,—but they were observed to be both of them swimming, not as if struggling to get away, but as if looking for something, which at last they both seized and carried to the boats. What was this treasure? What article could be so valued as to lead them to risk their lives? It was the ship's compass, which had been left behind, without which they could not have found their way out of those lonely southern seas into the high road of commerce. That compass was life to them, and the gospel of the living God is the same to us. You and I must venture all for the gospel: this infallible word of God must be guarded to the death. Men may tell us what they please, and say what they will, but we will risk everything sooner than give up those eternal principles by which we have been saved. The Lord give all of us his abundant grace that we may take fast hold of divine instruction. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Proverbs iv.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—560, 632, 684.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO TRUST AND PRAY.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 16TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear ~~it~~, he will answer thee."—Isaiah xxx. 19.

THE great sin of man is his alienation from God. He hath said in his heart, "No God," and in his life he laboureth to escape from the divine presence. The journey into the far country is not only made for the sake of the riotous living, but that he may get away from the Father's house. One would have thought man would turn unto the Lord in the day of trouble, even as Hosea said, "In their affliction they will seek me early." But this, alas, is not in truth and sincerity, for too often the sinner follows the example of Ahaz, of whom it is written, "In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord: this is that King Ahaz." All the trials and troubles in the world will not of themselves drive a man to God, but will the rather hurry him into rebellion, despair, and hardness of heart. Man will look in all directions sooner than look to God. He will sooner, like Saul, seek the help of a witch or a devil than seek the living God. He will rather make a league with death and a covenant with hell than turn his heart towards his best Friend and Helper. It is written, "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord!" Vain is the warning, for man still leans upon an arm of flesh, and counts it a foolish and fanciful thing to rely upon the almighty God.

Man shifts his ground of trust full often, and now depends on this, then on that, and in due course upon a score of equally unreliable confidences. Very early he is deceived, the staff of the broken reed upon which he essayed to lean pierces his hand. He smarts and bleeds; repents of his folly in one direction, and repeats it in another. He cries in the pride and stoutness of his heart, "The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones: the sycomores are cut down, but we

will change them into cedars." Though again and again deceived by his false confidences, he returns to them like the dog to his vomit. He chooses his own delusions and attempts again to build upon that sandy foundation which the tide has already shifted so many times. Nor is it only when he is deceived that he persists in his folly, for he continues in it when he knows that he has paid heavily for his folly, and has been impoverished by spending his money for that which is not bread. Egypt has drained his treasure, and has yielded him no assistance, and yet he sendeth more treasure to the same market only to be again ashamed of a people that could not profit him. He exercises painful thought, he spends his mental force, he schemes, he frets, he worries himself, to find in his carnal confidences some little consolation; and so he wasteth his life, and drieth up the very marrow of his bones in seeking for that in the creature which might so readily be found in the Creator. He rises up early, he sits up late, and he eats the bread of carefulness: but he will not turn unto the Lord, who alone giveth his beloved sleep. Even when impoverished and worn out with unbelief, man will not look to the Lord; even then he doteth upon some new thing which promises him assistance. He seems anxious to be duped and willing to be deluded. If at last all carnal trust is excluded, by sheer failure of every hope, he will lie down and die sooner than seek the Lord. He suffers, ah, how cruelly, from the vain joys in which he trusted, yet would he still pursue them if he could. He faints, he pines, he is ready to die, for he cannot fill his belly with the husks the swine do eat; but yet he will not, until almighty grace constrains him, turn his face toward the house where there is bread enough and to spare. He will sooner perish with hunger than confess his sin against heaven and begin to live by faith in God. This is the fruit of the fall, the black evidence of our depravity, the fruitful mother of destruction—"the carnal mind is enmity against God." We must needs have something to rely upon which we can see with our eyes and touch with our hands, but the invisible Jehovah we cannot trust, and yet he alone is the living and true God. Oh that we were wise, that we would understand this, and say within our hearts, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up."

Now all this time, while man is struggling to get away from God, the Lord is willing enough to receive him, to forgive him, to bless him, and to enrich him with every joy. Nor is he merely willing only but he is able, fully able to assist the troubled heart in every difficulty and to comfort under every distress. Therefore doth the Lord wait that he may be gracious, and he is exalted that he may show mercy. If the unwillingness were on God's part also we might very readily understand and in a measure justify the unwillingness of man to turn unto God, but when the Lord bids man return, invites him, reasons with him, entreats him, and makes every preparation for his reception, why is it that man refuses? His Lord has given rich promises of every help that he can want, and it is inexcusable ingratitude and wicked obstinacy on the part of man that still he persists in keeping aloof from his Creator. He chooses to perish for ever sooner than trust his God. Is not this the case of some who hear these my words?

I desire at this time to set forth the graciousness of God and his readiness to listen to the cry of the needy, with the hope that some here present who may have forgotten this, to whom it may be a time of need, may hear it and be encouraged to say, "I will arise and go to my Father." It is joy to me to hope that it will be so, but I remember with sadness that if I should be helped to set this forth clearly, and if any of you who are in trouble should afterwards refuse to trust in the Lord, your alienation will be aggravated, your sin will become still more crying. He who will not trust when he knows that the Lord will be gracious to him sins against his own soul and plunges himself in sevenfold wrath. If the Lord saith that he will be very gracious at the voice of your cry, what must be your doom if you will not cry?

I. In trying to set forth the overflowing grace of the Lord our God, I shall first of all speak upon the fact that THIS ASSURANCE IS PARTICULARLY SUITABLE TO CERTAIN CHARACTERS. "He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee." This is applicable and comfortable *to all afflicted people*. To such I speak. You are depressed at this time by heavy grief. Things have gone amiss with you: you do not prosper in business, or you are sickening in body, or a dear one lies at home pining away. We do not wonder that you feel exceedingly burdened in spirit. At the same time you are ill at ease as to your own state, the iron is entering into your soul. While passing through this thick darkness you will be strongly tempted to think hardly of God and to blame him for the troubles which now surround you; yet this will only make matters worse and increase your sin and your sorrow. Peradventure also you will be ready to despair and say, "There is no hope, I am taken as in a net, and there is no escape for me": though if you knew all you would chase away despair as your greatest enemy. Possibly you will be ready to try some wrong method by way of helping yourself out of present straits. Satan will suggest to you dishonest, impure, or reckless courses which hold out some shadow of relief. This is your danger at this time, and in pity to you the Lord bids us assure you that there is a far wiser course open to you, namely, to turn to him, for he will be very gracious unto you at the voice of your cry, and when he hears it he will answer you. There is help in God for your present trial, whatever form it assumes. Infinite wisdom understands it, and infinite power can help you through it. God can remove from you that which you are suffering, or he can prevent the occurrence of that which you dread; or if in his divine wisdom he shall see fit to lay the rod upon you, he can enable you to bear it, and make it to turn to your everlasting good. Be well assured that he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men out of any delight in their sorrows. He pities those who are afflicted, for he is very tender and full of compassion, and ever swift to succour the suffering. There is a needs be for the heavy trial which now bows you down; depend upon that, and do not repine. The Lord is not now visiting you in wrath, there is kindness in his severity. Can you not believe this? It is really so, and your strength, your comfort, your ultimate deliverance out of it all, will come through your knowing this to be true, and acting accordingly. By yielding yourself to God, and trusting him in this your evil plight, you will obtain deliverance. "For thus saith the Lord God,

the Holy One of Israel : in returning and rest shall ye be saved ; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."

In so large a congregation there must be some with broken hearts on account of their temporal trials. I am persuaded that I am speaking to some of the sons and daughters of woe. Go, ye sorrowing ones. Turn unto the hand that smites you. Kiss the rod and him that hath appointed it, and let your confidence henceforth be in the Lord, for he is God, and beside him there is none else. Say "From this time, my Father, I will seek thee, and thou shalt be my guide. Through Jesus Christ thy Son I will approach thee, trusting in his precious blood : help me and deliver me." You shall find him ready to pardon and rescue, and you shall live to sing of him whose "mercy endureth for ever." Let me whisper in your ear the sweet assurance of the text—"He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry ; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee."

A second class of persons to whom the text will be very applicable consists of *those who are troubled on account of sin*,—sinners who are beginning to feel the iniquity of their heels compassing them about. You are at this time overthrown with a sense of guilt and with the fear of punishment. You cannot well be smarting under severer blows than the law of God can give when it begins to smite the conscience and the heart. Now, in order to escape from sin and punishment, the very first thing with you is to come back to your God whom you have offended, since he alone can pardon you. There must be a turning of the face in repentance, and a looking of the eye by faith unto God in Christ Jesus, or you will die in your sins. The natural tendency of your heart even when under a sense of sin will be to keep from the Lord. Alas, you will look at your sin again and again and again, till you are ready to pine away in despair, but you will not look to Christ Jesus and be saved. A terrible sound is in your ears as of an approaching judgment, and you listen both to it and to the howlings of the dog of hell, but you refuse to hear the loving voice of compassion which tells of pardon bought with blood, freely given to all who trust their Saviour God. Possibly you may conclude that there is no hope for you in better things, and that therefore you had better enjoy such pleasures as may be found in sin, and take your swing while you may. Now, do not believe this lie of Satan. There is hope : you are in the land of mercy still. Poor guilty sinner, you are where pardons are commonly given, where God is gracious to all them that seek him. You have not yet come to the judgment seat, and to the voice of a trumpet waxing exceeding loud and long. Calvary is before you with dying love, not Sinai with consuming fire. To-day is the day of salvation ; the hour of vengeance is not yet. God willeth not your death, nor takes delight in your perdition, but desireth that you turn unto him and live, for he delighteth in mercy. A joyful acceptation awaits you if you return to your Father's house : he will not upbraid you for your wanderings, but he will take off your rags and put on the best robe of Christ's righteousness : he will fill the house with music concerning you, and he himself will rejoice over you. You need do nothing to make the Lord propitious, he is love already ; you need not undergo penance, nor pass through grievous anguish of spirit, in order to render God more merciful, for his grace aboundeth. In

Christ Jesus the stream of divine love floweth freely, swiftly, richly, even to the worst of men. Only return unto God against whom you have transgressed, acknowledge your transgression, and put your trust in him through Jesus Christ his Son, and "He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry ; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee."

Equally sweet will the assurance of our text be to *backsliders filled with their own ways*, who are alarmed and distressed at their grievous departures from their God. It is true, my dear friend, that you have very greatly transgressed in becoming a backslider : you have sinned against much light, and against much love, and this makes sin exceeding sinful. What peaceful hours you once enjoyed when you had communion with your Saviour and your God ! You have sinned against those sweet enjoyments, and against the condescending endearments of eternal love. You have done despite to the Spirit of God, and crucified the Son of God afresh. You were taught of the Lord in the deep things of his word, and the secret of his covenant was opened up to you ; you had an experimental acquaintance with the divine life, and you entered into the joys of sacred fellowship ; and yet you have turned aside from the way of the Lord, and been unfaithful to all your vows. You have left the cold flowing waters which come from the Rock of Ages to drink of the muddy pools of earth ; you have turned away from the living God to live upon the beggarly elements of the world ; you have bowed down before the golden calf, or some other image of jealousy ; you have gone far astray from the Most High, defiled the chastity of your soul, and provoked the Lord exceedingly. Moreover, you may well be grieved, for you have done much dishonour to the name of God amongst the ungodly : you have pierced his saints with many sorrows ; and you have made his ministers to go as with broken bones. You and such as you are our shame and our anguish. If you were cast off for ever as a traitor and left to die as a son of perdition what could be said but that you were reaping the fruit of your own ways ? Yet the text rings in your ears at this time like a clear silver bell, and its one note is grace—"he will be very gracious unto thee." "Turn, O backsliding children, for I am married unto you, saith the Lord." Return ; return ! It is thy bridegroom's voice that calls thee. With what sweeter notes wouldst thou be wooed ? "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." O beloved friend, hear the exhortation and let thy heart say, "I will return unto my first husband, for it was better with me then than now." He hath not shut up the bowels of his compassion, but he cries in the greatness of his love, "Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord ; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you : for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever." He has chastened thee sorely, but he has not given thee over unto death ; he hears thy groaning at this time, and his soul pities thee. Behold, he crieth, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim ? how shall I deliver thee, Israel ? how shall I make thee as Admah ? how shall I set thee as Zeboim ? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim : for I am God, and not man." Harken to me, O

wanderer : let a brother softly whisper it in thine ear, and may the Holy Ghost speak it to thine heart,—“ He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry ; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee.”

We are sure that a fourth class of persons will be very glad of the text, namely, *all believers in Christ who are at all exercised in heart* ; and we are all in that condition at times. We do not always dwell upon the mount of transfiguration nor sit at the festival of love in rapturous fellowship, but at times we are thrust into the furnace of soul-trouble, and our faces become black as a coal through grief of heart. We find it hard even to retain a spark of faith ; we even question whether we are the Lord's, though we resolve to battle on in his name, come what may. Even when by full assurance we can read our title clear we are apt to look forward, and there comes over us the fear that we shall yet fall by the hand of the enemy. If trials multiply, how will faith be able to stand ? When the days of weakness arrive, what shall we do in our old age ? Behind all stands the skeleton form of death : what shall we do in the swellings of Jordan ? We recollect how we ran with the footmen in our former trials, and they wearied us, and we ask ourselves, “ How shall we contend with horsemen ? ” When eternity is close in view, and when within a few hours we shall be made to confront the judgment seat, shall we bear it ? Will our religion then prove to be a reality, or will our hope dissolve like a dream ? Such questions torment our souls. Now, brothers and sisters, it will not do to try and answer these questions by taking counsel with the flesh. If you consult your own strength, it is clear that you cannot win the life-battle. What is your strength but perfect weakness ? If you look to your own wisdom, it is evident that you cannot guide your own way across the pathless desert of life. What is your wisdom but the essence of folly ? Come back, then, in childlike confidence to God, and go no more from him. Come to the very spot where your spiritual life commenced and find strength, wisdom, rest, and all in the living God. Let this verse smile on you and beckon you to God, “ He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry ; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee.” No trial shall happen to you but such as is common to man, and when the temptation comes the way of escape shall come with it. The burden shall always find your back strengthened to bear it, or else if your back be weak the burden shall not be laid upon you. The whole of your future history, though unknown to yourself, is spread out like a map before the eye of your great leader and guide. Follow where Jesus leads you, and know that he cannot forsake you ; he will make you to lie down in green pastures, and his goodness and his mercy will follow you all your days. Be careful for nothing, be prayerful for everything. Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust thou also in him and he shall bring it to pass ; and he shall bring forth thy judgment as the light and thy righteousness as the noonday. Go to his mercy-seat in every time of trial, for he will be very gracious to thee. Pour out thy heart before him and thou shalt have an answer of peace from the God of thy salvation.

Now, I think those four cases include the bulk of us, and, therefore, I would pray the Holy Spirit to speak the words of the text to every one here present. May we feel them dropping into our hearts like a soft

saturating rain—"He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee."

II. Now we will make a second observation, and dwell upon it for awhile: it is this—**THE ASSURANCE HERE GIVEN IS VERY FIRMLY BASED.** The words of our text are no old wives' fable, they are not such a pretty tale as mothers sometimes tell their children, a story made to please them, but not actually true. Our text is no fiction, it is a faithful saying from the mouth of God. "He will be very gracious unto thee." What, then, is the ground of this assurance?

And first I would say, the ground of our comfort is found in *the plain promise of God* as given in the text, and in many similar declarations which are scattered all over the Scriptures. I have repeated this text a great many times in my sermon, because it is far better than anything which can be spoken by man. Let me read it again. You want to know why we should turn to God and trust him; it is because thus saith the Lord who can neither lie nor change: "He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee." This is a portion of his infallible word, is it not? It is true, then: you have no doubt about its being so. Come, then, with your Bible open, put your finger upon the words and say, "I believe that God is here declaring his readiness to be very gracious to me and to hear my prayer." Now, what more do you want? Does a child need any better assurance than his father's word? Does a true disciple ask any stronger evidence than his Master's promise? "It is written," is not that enough for you? Go on your knees and plead this word at once. If your friend had said, "I will grant your request," would you not believe him? Doubt not, then, your God, your Father. He has never given you cause to mistrust his word. Are not all his promises faithful? Come, then, the assurance is well grounded. If there were only this one promise, it ought to be enough, but see how many there are! The gracious promises of God's word are as many as the stars which bestud the midnight sky. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." "My grace is sufficient for thee." "Fear not, I will help thee." "He that believeth shall not be confounded." "Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." I need not quote them, for you know them well, and their number is very great, but they are all made to faith, and none of them to unbelief. Have thou faith in them and believe thy God, and his words shall be fulfilled in thy happy experience.

A second ground upon which this assurance is built is *the gracious nature of God*. The text intimates this. "He will be very gracious unto thee." It is the nature of God, the God of Israel, to be very generous in his dealings, he openeth his hand and supplieth the want of every living thing. He is the God of bounty. Nor does he stay there, for while he is bountiful to his needy creatures, he is also merciful to his sinful creatures. Judgment is his strange work, but he delighteth in mercy. Nothing pleases him more than to pass by transgression, iniquity, and sin. That he might indulge his attribute of mercy he sacrificed the darling of his soul, even his Son Jesus. He loved his Son, but he loved his mercy so greatly, and he loved sinful man so heartily, that "he spared not his own Son, but freely delivered

him up for us all," that he might have mercy upon our guilty race. See then, what a merciful God he is. Nor does he end even here, for to those whom he has forgiven he is rich in lovingkindnesses. His love is very wonderful, deeper than the abyss, higher than the heavens, broader than the sea. Well, now, what is thy trouble? Trust thy merciful God to help thee. What is thy sin? Trust thy merciful God to forgive thee. What are thy backslidings? Trust thy merciful God to restore thee. What are the trials thou art expecting? Rely upon thy merciful God to bear thee through. If he were a tyrant thou mightest well flee from him, but as his mercy endureth for ever it will be thy wisdom to turn to him. Come, let us all together go, by an act of faith, this moment, and cast ourselves at Jehovah's feet, and, though we see him not, yet let us henceforth trust him as he hath revealed himself in Christ Jesus; so shall we be at peace with him, and hereby good shall come unto us. It is certain from the character of God, which abounds in love, grace, and mercy, that he will be gracious to those who seek him; let us seek him at once, every one of us. The text saith not "he will be gracious," but "he will be *very* gracious." I love to see grace thus decorated with expressive words. It refreshes my mind to think that very frequently when we read of the mercy of God in Scripture there is some word with it by way of intimating its greatness, its freeness, or its excellence. "God who is rich in mercy." "Thou Lord art plenteous in mercy." "The Lord is good, his mercy is everlasting." "The tender mercy of our God." "His mercy endureth for ever." "His merciful kindness is great toward us." "According to his abundant mercy he hath begotten us again unto a lively hope." "According to the multitude of his tender mercies." See what great words go with the mention of the Lord's mercy: there is no fear of exaggerating it, for all language falls short. In the text we have the word "very." "He will be *very* gracious unto thee." Dost thou need special comfort? thou shalt have it. Dost thou want great help? thou shalt have it. Come, thou grievous sinner, there is plenteous forgiveness. Come thou sorely afflicted one, there is rich consolation. Come thou weary wanderer, there is complete restoration. Come thou impoverished and needy one, there are abounding supplies.

"Rivers of love and mercy here,
In a rich ocean join;
Salvation in abundance flows,
Like floods of milk and wine."

The assurance of the text is grounded upon the merciful nature of God, and may be relied upon without hesitation.

And next it is based upon the grand fact of *the prevalence of prayer*. "He will be very gracious to thee at the voice of thy cry." Is it not a wonderful thing that God permits men to pray? It is a more wonderful thing that they do not pray when he permits them. It is marvellous that God should hearken to the voice of a man. This has been so astonishing to mere thinkers that they cannot admit it to be true, and consequently they have asserted that there could be no actual power in prayer to move the heart of God. I do not wonder that they should have thought so, for though this surprising truth is not contrary to reason it is certainly far *above* reason. Now, we know, for we have

tried it, that God heareth prayer : therefore we say to you, go to him and test him, for he will be gracious to the voice of your cry. God has been pleased to set up a mercy-seat ; answer me, O doubting one, would there be a divinely-appointed mercy-seat for the presentation of prayer if the Lord did not intend to hear prayer ? He has sprinkled that mercy-seat with the blood of his only-begotten Son, that through that atonement the guilty might approach him. Would he shed that matchless blood, and yet reject the sinner who comes trusting therein ? In addition to all this, he has promised to give the Holy Spirit to assist in prayer, helping our infirmities, because we know not what we should pray for as we ought. Would he give that Holy Spirit, and still suffer prayer to be ineffectual ? It is not conceivable. It delights God to listen to the cries of his creatures. Your voice may be very cracked and inharmonious, and your prayer may be like an infant's wailing, or like the cry of a young bird in its nest when it is hungry ; but he who heareth the young ravens when they cry will hear your inarticulate, discordant utterances, therefore pour out your heart before him.

He will answer thee, too, and that very quickly. "When he hears thy prayer, he will answer thee"—so says the text. Has he not said, "Before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear" ? Where there is true prayer for grace in the heart the prayer is heard before it is offered ; for it is grace that makes us pray in such a fashion. He who asks for grace sincerely has grace already in a measure or else he would not be inclined to ask for more. Let this encourage us. Since God waiteth to be gracious, and hath in wondrous condescension endued prayer with such privileges in his sacred courts, who among us will not turn unto him now, with all our heart, and cry to him, "My Father, save and help me now ?"

I am pleading for my God, and I know that I am advocating the best of causes, but my tongue and my mind fall short in the argument. I do not, however, much regret my want of eloquence in this matter, for it is better that the theme should plead for itself. May the Lord by his Eternal Spirit make the reasonableness and the blessedness of the claim to appeal to your conscience and your heart, and instead of searching elsewhere for succour may you now turn to your God in loving trustfulness.

If you required further confirmation of your faith beyond the three truths which I have laid before you, namely, the promise itself, the nature of God, and the efficacy of prayer, I could ask many in this house to-day to give their *personal testimony* as to the result of faith in God and supplication to him. We can speak positively, for we speak from actual trial of faith and prayer. I have now reached middle life, and having known the Lord from my youth up I can speak from eight-and-twenty years' experience. Through the favour of God I have led a very happy life by faith in his name. I have not been without many trials, sicknesses, and difficulties, and some of these are daily with me, but in all things faith sustains me. I bear my witness that confidence in man is utter folly, and brings sorrow to the soul : but I am more than ever certain that confidence in God is always wise, never leads to disappointment, and never causes regret. I mourn that I have not trusted my Lord more fully, and I lament that I have not attempted greater things in reliance upon his word ; but I have no

question that faith is right, and I am sure that it will always be justified by results. Speaking deliberately, as though I were bearing witness concerning my fellow man in a court of justice, I have no word to say by way of questioning the faithfulness, and goodness, and truthfulness of my Lord, but I am bound to declare that he has heard my prayers, not once nor twice, but evermore, and hath been gracious to the voice of my cry. Why speak I thus? Why must the objectionable "I" be introduced? Because I cannot ask anyone else in the audience to stand up and speak without disturbing the order of our service; but if I could do so, my brethren and sisters here by the hundred would each one offer similar testimony. Dear friends, your troubles have been different from mine, you have tested God in other directions than I have done, but you have equally found him true: have you not? Is not his word like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times? Some of you are older than I. The snows of many a winter whiten your brows, but in no one day of all those seventy years has the Lord been unfaithful to you. Are you verging upon fourscore? Still in that long period there has not been a single breach of covenant on the part of your Lord. Your last days are freer from doubt than your former years; though your spirits are by no means so elastic your peace is less disturbed. Each year of your life trust in God grows easier, for facts prove the reality of his working, and fellowship with your invisible Friend makes his influence over you to be more constant and powerful. The path of faith increases in brightness: every hour accumulates evidence for its support. We know and are persuaded of the love which God hath towards us. Verily he is gracious, and inclineth his ear to his people.

III. There I leave this matter, and I close by the third observation, which is this: THE ASSURANCE OF THE TEXT BEING SO WELL CONFIRMED SHOULD BE PRACTICALLY ACCEPTED AT ONCE. If God will be gracious to the voice of our cry, and when he hears it will answer us, let us renounce at once all earthborn confidences. Let us defile the covering of our graven images and cast them away, and say unto our false confidence, "Get thee hence." "We have done so," says one. Do it again, brother, for the tendency of thy heart is still to rest in that which is seen rather than in the invisible Jehovah. Idolatry is bound up in our hearts. Cast out the idol yet again. Alas, some of you have never done so; your carnal hope still usurps the place of God. Let me put it to you. *What is your confidence for life?* You all have some confidence or other; what is yours, young man? What is *your* reliance, O man in middle life? Especially, O greybeard, what is thy confidence now? Thou hast good reason to examine it, for soon thou wilt need it; and woe to thee if it be found to fail. What is your confidence, my brother? Is it your wealth? Is it your strong common sense? Is it your stalwart frame—that strong pair of arms which hitherto have enabled you to stem the current? What are you relying upon? Will it support you in death? Will it stand you in good stead in eternity? I know it will not if it be anything short of the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Come let us flee from all creature confidence as from a filthy thing, for it is base to the last degree for a creature to be trusting in another creature and putting that creature into the place of its Creator. Let us abhor such idolatrous

trust. Let us shun it also as a vexing and deceitful thing, for it is treacherous as the smooth, deceitful sea, and it mocks us as the mirage of the desert mocks the thirsty traveller. Let us flee from vain confidence in self or in man, for it is a poisonous thing; the fiery flying serpent of Egypt was not more deadly than confidence in an arm of flesh. Let us away from it and never return. O trusters in that which is seen, leave your idols, cast them to the moles and to the bats, even the dearest of them all. If your confidence be in yourself, fly from yourself, for you have no worse enemy. Flee from unbelief and carnal trust, and provoke not the Lord to jealousy by setting up another God, for there is no other. "Once have I spoken, yea twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God." Trust not then where there is no power, but set all your confidence upon the Almighty.

If this be done, and you flee away from other trusts, then let me commend you at the same time to *refuse despair*. When a man sees that his confidences are broken up like a potter's vessel till, to use the expressive figure of the prophet, there is not a piece left large enough to take fire from the hearth, or to take water out of the pit, then he is apt to exclaim, "Now it is all over with me, and I must needs perish." You loved your wife, she was all the world to you; but, alas, she is dead, and you cry, "Let me die also." You hugged your wealth, it has melted; that speculation has dissolved it, and left you a beggar: and now you cry, "What is there worth living for?" Beware of dark thoughts, which may beset you just now. In your worst moment, should Satan whisper in your ear a suggestion concerning rope, or knife, or poison bowl, or sullen stream, flee from it with all your soul. Obey the apostolic word, "Do thyself no harm." Nothing could be worse for thee than to break the law, which saith expressly, "Thou shalt do no murder." Self-destruction, if done by a man in his senses, is a daring defiance of God, and the sealing of damnation. This is to leap from measured trouble into infinite woe, the depth of which none can guess. Why shouldst thou do this? Turn unto thy God; that is a wiser thing for a man to do than to destroy his own life; yea, there is something braver for a man to do than to rush upon the pikes of the foe because the battle waxeth too hot for him. Go thou to thy great Captain, even to him whom God hath given to be a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people, and he will make thee more than a conqueror. There are brighter days in store for thee yet. Yea, there are days to come, which shall never end, of everlasting life and blessedness if thou wilt but now in thy distress cast thyself upon the covenanted mercies of God in Christ Jesus his Son. It is grand to spring up from despair into the fulness of delight, and many a man hath done this at a bound. This earth moveth by slow degrees from the frosts of winter into the bright days of June, but God can make our souls to pass out of the deepest despair into the brightest hope in a single moment, and if we do but trust and rest in him it shall be done.

I know some who do not trust their all with God because they have picked a quarrel with him. They resemble a little child I have heard of who one night would not say his prayers. His fond mother said to him, "Dear child, why do you not pray?" "Mother," said he, "I shall not say

my prayers to God any more, because he let my little bird die." Do not some people talk thus against God? They have a quarrel about their dead child, or their lost property. Now, if you get into such a state of sullenness it will go hard with you; it would be far better if you would bow to the divine decision and believe that God meaneth your good. Oh, do believe the words of my text. May his Holy Spirit lead you to believe them. "He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry."

Those two counsels being followed, namely, the renunciation of carnal hope, and at the same time the determination not to despair, there remaineth only this, that we do now *try the power of prayer and child-like confidence in God*. But you say, "There is no hope for me." Have you ever sought for mercy? "I do not think I should be heard." Have you ever tried? Dear heart, have you ever gone into your chamber, and shut to your door, opened the word of God and found out a gracious promise, and then said, "Lord, fulfil this promise to me. For Christ's sake be gracious to me. I trust thee, and expect thee to be gracious to me"? If any one of you has tried this and it has failed, please let me know it, for I am in the habit of continually saying that "him that cometh to Christ he will in no wise cast out," and I do not want to spread a falsehood. If you find that Jesus casts you out, do let me know it, for I would not like to go about telling lies. I have asked others, and I have tried for myself, but I have never found any exception to the rule—"he that believeth in him shall not be ashamed nor confounded;" nor of that other rule—"every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." If I can have evidence true and certain that God does not honour faith and does not hear prayer, I must revise my convictions, contradict my statements, and disbelieve my own consciousness. Have you ever tried believing prayer? Most of the people who disbelieve the Bible have never read it with care and attention; those who doubt the faithfulness of God have never tried it; and those who deride prayer have never practised it. But, mind, I am speaking of real prayer, not of repeating certain good words. I am not talking of formal prayer, but of going with your heart to the unseen God, and telling him what you feel and what you want, and trusting him to supply your wants, and help you. Have you done this? Go and try prayer at once, I beseech you. Divine Spirit, help these poor souls to pray this day. If you do pray and trust this day it shall be unto you as the beginning of days, and from henceforth you shall delight yourselves in the abundance of peace. O believer, it shall be true of you, "His soul shall dwell at ease, and his seed shall inherit the earth." From the Lord's good Spirit there shall come to you such grace that you shall be blessed, and become a blessing to others. You shall walk happily before the Lord in this land of the dying, and then shall abide with him for ever in the land of the living above. God bless you all for his name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah xxx.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—125, 747.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE HEAD STONE OF THE CORNER.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 28RD, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord: O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity."—Psalm cxviii. 22—25.

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to fix with certainty the occasion which first suggested this psalm: it has even been thought to be purely prophetic, and rather foretelling history than narrating it. I rather incline to the opinion that some Israelitish hero, chosen of God to high office in the midst of his people, had been rejected by their rulers, had passed through many struggles, some of them of the most violent kind, and at last, notwithstanding the rejection of the people and their leaders, had attained to a prominent position, nay, to a chief place in the midst of the nation. The psalm is applicable to Christ, and to him it is referred in the New Testament several times, but probably from the human point of view it was at first intended to celebrate the victory of some chosen man of God who, despite his divine election, had been rejected by his countrymen. Providence conducted him to a crowning success, and he magnified the Lord for it. In some way or other a stone has come to be connected with several persons whose history was of this character. Remember Jacob. He flees from his father's house because Esau threatens to kill him: he appears to be the rejected member of Isaac's family, by whom the house would never be built up. At the end of a day's journey he lies down with *a stone* for his pillow, and as he sweetly slumbers he sees heaven open, beholds the mystic ladder, and rises assured of the love of the Almighty God. By faith thus infused into his soul he becomes strong for his future life, and so lives that now the house of Abraham and Isaac stands represented in the seed of Jacob alone, and Esau with all his dukes has utterly passed away.

The next occurrence of the stone happens in reference to Joseph, of whom the dying Jacob said, "From thence is the Shepherd *the stone*



of Israel." He was separated from his brethren by their envy and grievously wounded by their malice. They said, "Behold, this dreamer cometh"; and they sold him for a slave into the stranger's land. From the dungeons of Egypt he climbed to the throne, and became the cornerstone of Israel's house. On his bosom his aged father could lay his head and dream as he did at Bethel; and by his power and wisdom the shepherd family was happily built up.

Then came David, whom his elder brethren despised, and even his father passed him over, until the prophet of God asked for him, that he might be anointed with oil. Out of his hand went that *stone* of Israel which laid low the pride of Philistia. Goliath must bite the ground when the stone of Israel flies from the hand of Israel's shepherd, who was destined to be her king. He was rejected and hated by Saul, so that he wandered about in the wilderness, hiding in cave and rock until the hour came when he was called to the throne. Then the stone which the builders refused became the headstone of the corner, and he and his people confessed that it was the Lord's doing, and it was marvellous in their eyes. Be not afraid, O ye persecuted ones, for you shall fulfil your destiny. It has happened again and again in history that those who have been destined to do great things for the Lord have first of all been compelled to pass through a trying ordeal of misunderstanding and rejection. Such history repeats itself; it may do so in your instance. The speckled bird of the family, the one least beloved, often rises to take the most prominent place. Jephthah was driven out from his father's family, and yet in their distress his brethren were glad enough to make him their champion and accept him as their head. Bow thy head in patience, young man, and bear whatever God or his enemies may lay upon thee, for assuredly as the Lord is in thee and with thee he will bring thee forth, and of thee, too, it shall be true in thine own little way, "The stone which the builders refused, the same is become the head stone of the corner."

At this time, however, we shall confine our application of these verses to our blessed Lord himself, to whom they most evidently refer. Their meaning is focussed upon him, and in reference to him each word is emphatic. He applied them to himself; for Matthew tells us in the twenty-first chapter of his gospel that our Lord said to the chief priests and Pharisees, "Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner?" You remember also how Peter said in the face of the crucifiers of Christ, "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." In his first epistle Peter refers again to this psalm in the well-remembered words, "Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the

corner." Of our own exalted Lord we are going to speak at this time, and may the Spirit bear witness in our hearts to his honour.

I. First, I invite your thoughts to CHRIST REJECTED—"the stone which the builders refused." The Lord Jesus came into this world at the fulness of time when the Messiah was expected by those devout men who waited for salvation in Israel. He came born of parents descended from that royal house from which Messiah was prophesied as coming, and he was born in the very city which had been pointed out by seers of old. All details of his life in his early days corresponded with prophetic intimations and answered to the signs which the Lord had appointed. There was nothing in which he did not exactly fit the symbols of the sanctuary and the personal types of history: everything which could speak, cried with one voice, "Behold the Lamb of God." He was clearly placed before the Jewish people as the stone which God would lay in Zion as the foundation of their hopes, but *they persistently refused him*. It was not from want of evidence, for John came prophesying concerning him, and as I have already said he was but the last of a long list of prophets who had all pointed to him as the Anointed of the Lord: and yet Israel rejected him. His own miracles and teaching were more than sufficient evidence of his mission, but Israel would none of him. He was a stone evidently of God's quarrying and preparing. His extraordinary birth marked him out as differing from all the rest of mankind; his surpassing excellence and moral beauty declared him to be destined to the highest position. His person displayed the marvellous love and wisdom of God, and with half an eye, if they had willed to see it, the Jews might have perceived that he was anointed to be the corner stone of the spiritual temple; but yet they refused him. "He came unto his own and his own received him not." He came to those who had the oracles, but in this thing they set at nought the oracle; he came to those who had the law and the prophets, but they were deaf to all holy testimonies and disowned him. Alas, for the blindness of men's hearts.

His rejection was rendered the more remarkable and the more sorrowful because *he was rejected by the builders or leaders of the nation*. "The stone which *the builders* refused." If the common people who were ignorant of the law had not perceived him to be the chosen stone we might not have wondered; but there were men of learning and research among the people, and these rejected him. They had builders who understood spiritual architecture, or professed to do so—the scribes who studied the law, and the priests who taught the people—these were the master-builders, whose business it was to make the selection of the corner stone; but these rejected our Lord. It was not alone the mob of Jerusalem that rejected Christ, but the rulers led the way. True, the many cried, "Crucify him!" but not till they were bribed by the priests, the clergy of the day, by the Sadducees, or sceptical men of science, and by the Pharisees, or ritualistic professors: these were they who sat in Moses' seat, in whom the people had confidence, and by their machinations the people were led to reject the corner stone which the Lord himself had laid.

Concerning this rejection we must also remark that it was no common one: *it was a violent and indignant rejection*. They were not content to say, "He is not the Messiah," but they turned their hottest malice

against him ; they were furious at the sight of him. This precious stone was kicked against and rolled about with violence, and all manner of ridicule was poured upon it. Nothing would content them but the blood of the man who had disturbed their consciences and questioned their pretensions. "The stone which the builders *refused*" is to be read with a heavy stress upon the word REFUSED. Peter says, "He was set at nought of you builders." They slandered him in life and mocked him in death ; they spat their accusations against him when he was free, and gave him over to be defiled with the spittle of the soldiers' mouths when he was bound. They made him live an outcast's life, and then they hung him up to die a felon's death.

This rejection was most unreasonable : they did violence to truth and justice by their evil deed. For which of his works did they stone him ? There was nothing in his character which should have incensed them, there was nothing about him which ought to have excited their doubts, much less their wrath ; but yet they wilfully and resolutely rejected him. They said, "We will not have this man to reign over us." The cause in part was blind prejudice. They expected a king surrounded with earthly pomp and girt with physical force to break the Roman yoke and create an Israelitish empire more famous than that of Solomon ; and because he came as the son of a lowly virgin, robed in a peasant's dress, and humbly dwelt among the sons of men in meekest fashion, therefore they refused him. There was no real reason why he should have been refused because of his humiliation, for was not their Messiah so to come ? Did not Isaiah say, "He shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground : he hath no form nor comeliness ; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." He agreed with the prophecies, but not with their prejudices, and therefore they cried, "Away with him : away with him." Those prejudices were the result of sheer ignorance, for if they had studied the word they would have seen that the Christ of God was not the Christ of their dream ; and had they searched the Scriptures they might have known that Jesus of Nazareth was the Lord of glory. They had eyes, but would not see ; the light was around them, but they comprehended it not. The pride of their hearts kept them in ignorance ; they did not want to know. The proud philosophic Sadducee felt sure of his ground, for he was a thinker, and despised the vulgar many : he did not wish for evidence as to the existence of angel or spirit, or of the resurrection of the dead, and therefore he scornfully rejected the man who brought life and immortality to light. The Pharisee, supremely righteous in himself, did not want to know a man who taught him that he was lost, and came to be the Saviour of sinners. He felt too safe already to need saving.

Thus the Ever-blessed was chased out of the world by the pride which scorns all excellence except its own. Men flung away God's dearest jewel because it outshone their own counterfeit jewellery. Nor was it pride alone, for that mother sin was surrounded with all other evils. They wanted to devour widows' houses in secret, and he exposed them : they wanted to go on saying their long prayers and yet to persecute the righteous, and he unmasked them. Certain of them wanted to be free-thinkers, and yet to be thought orthodox, and he denounced them as

hypocrites: they denied the essential principles of revelation, but he came forth from the Father to bear witness of God, and therefore they utterly abhorred him. Their sin, as it could not associate with his holiness, raised a clamour against him, and with cunning and malice they denounced, condemned, and utterly rejected the stone which God had appointed to be the foundation and corner-stone of his New Jerusalem. Ah, my brethren, you know what came of it. They threw that chosen stone away, and when they had removed it away from their Babel-building they thought their troubles at an end, when, indeed, they had just begun. That stone was removed out of the way, and yet they stumbled upon it; they stumbled to their own confusion, yea, they stumbled to their own destruction. How broken were they by that stone at the awful siege of Jerusalem, when they and their city perished. Now, also, that stone has been lifted up into heaven by the mighty power of God, and in the fulness of time it will descend upon these foolish builders with terrible effect; for upon whomsoever it shall fall it will grind him to powder. Even while that stone was here they fell upon it and were broken; but when he comes a second time he will fall upon them, and woe unto them in that day. Let us not be among the company of the rejecters; let us not consort with those who cast doubts upon the gospel of Jesus. Rather let our hearts joyfully bless God for appointing him to be the head of the corner; let us accept him in that character and at once build upon him.

“ Chosen of God, to sinners dear,
And saints adore the name;
We trust our whole salvation here,
Nor shall we suffer shame.”

God forbid that we should reject the testimony of God concerning his Son, and so make God a liar and bring down eternal wrath upon our own heads. Our safety lies in reception, not in rejection, for to “as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” As for those who reject him, we hear with trembling these words from the lips of the loving Jesus: “But these mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.”

II. With great delight I now pass to the second topic, which is **CHRIST EXALTED**—“The stone which the builders refused *is become the head stone of the corner*”—that is to say, at this moment Christ has *the chief place of honour* in the building of God. He is the head stone, for he is higher than the kings of the earth: he is higher than all the opposing powers of wisdom or of superstition; and he is the head over all things to his church. Glory be to his name, in the midst of his people he is above all and over all: we worship him with rapture. He is King of kings and Lord of lords, “for by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.” There is none like him among the sons of men; in all things he has the pre-eminence. He that was crucified is now enthroned; he that lay in the grave now reigneth in glory.

Nor is he alone eminent for his position of honour, but for his *surpassing usefulness*. He is the head stone of the corner, that stone which joins two walls together, and is the bond of the building. Jew and Gentile are now one in Christ Jesus. It is true he is a stone in Israel's wall, but he is also a stone in the Gentile's wall : in him is neither Jew nor Gentile distinctively, for they are both there inclusively. He hath made both one. The Pharisees would have it that the wall should finish within the line of Judah's race, but not so thought our Master. His heart went forth to the other sheep which he had that were not yet of the fold. This made them wrathful, but their wrath did not prevent his accomplishing his design, and now he is the bond of the building, holding Jew and Gentile in firm unity. This precious corner stone binds God and man together in wondrous amity, for he is both in one. He joins earth and heaven together, for he participates in each. He joins time and eternity together, for he was a man of few years, and yet he is the Ancient of Days. Wondrous corner stone ! Thou dost bind all of us together who are in thee, so that by love of thee we are builded together for a temple of the Holy Ghost. Thou art the perfect bond, the eternal hold-fast, the divine cement which holds the universe in one. Is it not written, "By him all things consist" ?

Our Lord Jesus Christ then is brought up from all rejection and shame to which his enemies put him to be by usefulness and by honour the grandest personage upon the face of the earth ; and all this *none the less, but all the more, because he was rejected*. He lost nothing by his enemies. They scourged his back, but they did not rob him of that imperial purple which now adorns him ; they crowned him with thorns, but those thorns have increased the brilliance of his diadem of light ; they pierced his hands, and thereby prepared them to sway an irresistible sceptre of love over men's hearts : they nailed his feet, but those feet stand firm for ever upon the throne of sovereignty : they crucified him, but his crucifixion led him to his greater honour, since he therein finished the work which was given him to do, and now also God hath highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name. As it has been, so is it, and so shall it be : man's opposition to the gospel will not interfere with it one single whit, but the eternal purposes of Jehovah shall be fulfilled. Our adversaries may mine and undermine, they may openly oppose and secretly assail, but upon this rock, even upon Christ, shall the truth and the church for ever rest, and no harm shall come to it. The Lord will lift the stone which the builders refused, and make it to become the headstone of the corner ; therefore let us not fail nor be discouraged.

Already our text has been fulfilled. Our Lord Christ was dead and buried, but his foes were desperately afraid that he would rise again, and so they rolled a stone to the tomb's mouth and sealed it ; but he rose for all that, and became the first-fruits of them that slept, the headstone of the resurrection. His resurrection utterly defeated those who reckoned upon destroying his power. What could they do against one whom death itself could not silence ? When his resurrection attested his mission, what could they say against him ? Nor was this all, for to add to his honour he was received up into heaven. Beyond the eternal hills he rose, the gates of heaven opening at his coming ; and amidst the acclamation of

angels and redeemed spirits he ascended to the highest place that heaven affords. What a change from Gabbatha and all the maltreatment of the Pavement to the sea of glass mingled with fire, and to the seat of infinite majesty ! Jesus has gone from the bar to the throne, and there he sitteth in majesty. His adversaries may grind their teeth at him, but the King is set upon the holy hill of Zion beyond their wrath. " Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing ? " Jehovah Jesus is King and none can challenge his sovereignty.

At Pentecost, too, this was fulfilled, for when his few and humble disciples were inspired by the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with tongues of fire, all Jerusalem rang with the wonder, and then again the despised and rejected stone was made the head stone of the corner. Very speedily throughout the known world the testimony of his name was made to sound forth till his word had gone forth as far as the sun's utmost track, and all nations beheld the light thereof. Then the gods of the heathen tottered, and colossal systems of idolatry were ground to powder. Glory be unto thee, O Christ ; thou didst triumph gloriously in those first ages of thy church ! That triumph is proceeding still. It will be consummated by-and-by. What confusion will take hold upon the hearts of his adversaries when he shall be revealed ! He is hidden now, and his people with him, but the day draweth nigh when he shall come a second time to be admired in all them that believe. What astonishment will then take hold upon those who refused his righteous claims. Then will they know that this is the Lord's doing ; though it will be terrible in their eyes. All intelligent beings, even down to the blackest devil of hell, shall at the second advent of our Lord be obliged to confess that the stone which the builders refused hath become the head stone of the corner. The Man of Nazareth shall be Lord of all before the eyes of all mankind. For that we diligently look. I call upon you, dear brothers and sisters, this morning, greatly to rejoice in the fact which we have thus brought before you. It is a grand truth that Christ Jesus is now enthroned beyond the reach of those who rejected and despised him,

" Honour immortal must be paid,
Instead of scandal and of scorn :
While glory shines around his head,
And a bright crown without a thorn."

III. Thirdly, I ask your attention to the next point, which is introduced to us by the twenty-third verse. THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST IS DUE TO GOD ALONE,—"*This is the Lord's doing*, and it is marvellous in our eyes." Now, this was so as a matter of history. Jesus Christ's name and work were at length had in honour in the world, but this was due to no man's wisdom, eloquence, or power, but entirely to the Lord, who is wonderful in counsel and great in might. Look, my brethren, if the Scribes and Pharisees had endorsed the claims of our Lord it might have been said that Christianity was grafted upon the old stock of Judaism, and therefore grew with vigour ; and if Pilate, or Herod, or any of the great ones, especially if the Cæsar of the day had accepted it, then the following ages would have said, " Oh yes, he derived his power, and was lifted to his place through the prestige of empire and the prowess of arms." But it was not so. All the

establishments on earth were against him: rank and station despised the carpenter's son: superstition abhorred his simplicity and spirituality; ceremonialism would have nothing to do with him who said that the temple was to be destroyed: scepticism could not endure him, for he gave not a jot of ground for its doubts, or food for its speculations; and the kings of the earth, and the statesmen thereof, utterly derided him; for he spake of a kingdom which was not of this world. And yet he triumphed, and now his name is the most famous among the sons of men. This was not because poets sat waiting upon Parnassus to pour forth their loftiest lays, or because minstrels with their fingers on their harp-strings stood prepared to draw forth matchless music to celebrate his advent. No; the hymns which were composed in his honour had a lowly virgin and an equally humble matron as their authors; and the music which saluted him was the noise of children in the streets, shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David." The Son of man owes nothing of his glory to man: his elevation to the throne is the Lord's doing, and marvellous in our eyes.

And while this is true as to the past it remains true at this day, for the gospel of Christ, whenever it spreads in the earth, owes its triumphs entirely to divine interposition. When I consider how hostile is human nature to the gospel, *the very existence of a true Church in the world is to me a miracle*. Nor to me alone does it appear so, for it really is a superhuman work and is wrought by the Lord alone. Just think of it. Why, at this very day, we have all the wisdom and power and eloquence and skill of the superstition of the world arrayed against the simple gospel of Jesus. Though they are agreed in nothing else, they all unite against Christ. He of the Seven Hills has nothing but maledictions for the pure gospel of Jesus, and with him stand a hierarchy clothed with terrible power, and a troop of Jesuits who stick at nothing. Completely organized, numerous, subtle, all pervading, the warriors of Rome are a great host, and not to be lightly thought upon. See how superstition multiplies in this land. See how the builders, appointed by the state to build up a Protestant church, are pulling it down with both hands. These, forsooth, are priests, clergy,—God's heritage! And what are they doing? Uplifting an idolatrous crucifix in the place of the doctrine of the cross; setting sacraments in the room of the precious blood, and preaching salvation by their own priestcraft instead of salvation by the grace of God through Jesus Christ. The builders are rejecting him, and yet his cause lives on. The wise men on the other side of the house, the builders who affect to be scientific scholars, and persons of advanced thought and thorough culture, these also have their fling against the gospel. For aught I can see of their pretended depth of learning, I would recommend them to attend to their science and obtain a little more culture before they set up for teachers, or they may expose their own shallowness. These boastfully wise men, these self-styled *thinking men*, are all against the gospel of Jesus. When I see the power which at the present time is enlisted on the side of doubt and scepticism, I for my part am astonished that anybody believes the gospel at all, and I feel that it is the Lord's doing and marvellous in mine eye. True faith is supernatural; it standeth not in the wisdom of man, but in divine power. Wherever Christ is exalted, as, blessed be his name, he is in

many churches, it is not because of any wit or skill or power on the part of the minister, but because the Holy Ghost is at work among the people bringing them to Christ. Do not, then, dear brethren, despond on behalf of Christ's cause. The real progress of Christianity must be supernatural. Whenever we fight with the wooden sword of reason we may expect to be defeated; not because the gospel is against reason or contrary to it, but because it is so much above reason that we cannot comprehend it, and, therefore, lose power by healing gospel truth, as if it were a human discovery. If there be not working with Christianity a divine agency altogether above its reasonableness, if there be not, in fact, the Spirit of God working with it to convert men, then it will come to naught and vanish like other systems. Our reliance must be, therefore, not upon evidences which we can bring to prove the truth of the gospel, nor upon eloquence by which we may advance its claims, but upon the Eternal Spirit of God, for it is he, and he alone, who can lift the rejected stone and make it to become the head stone of the corner. It is impossible for blinded human nature to believe the truth of God; and hence we must be born again. Gospel teachings are so humbling, so radical, so pure, so spiritual, so much above our thoughts, that nobody will accept them unless taught of God. His chosen people shall be taught of the Spirit, and the rest will choose to remain in blindness. So it has been, and so it ever shall be; but, beloved, let us not tremble because of this, for despite human blindness, and the opposition of the wise, Christ must reign even to the world's end.

Did I hear a whisper that ministers are nowadays very broad, and have given up the old gospel. I know it, and I am not surprised: the builders are the first to reject the chosen stone. Christ owes little to preachers, and some of his worst enemies are found in their ranks. Unconverted men are in too many pulpits, and are seeking out many inventions to set aside the pure gospel which exalts Christ Jesus. Let them alone, the ditch is gaping for these blind guides. Our Lord can do without them. He owes his victories to himself, and to himself alone; and, therefore, let the faith of his people rest in peace, for if they will have patience they shall see greater things than they have yet beheld. Our text saith that it is not only the Lord's doing and marvellous, but it is marvellous "*in our eyes*," which it could not be if we did not see it. We shall see and we shall marvel. Some of us may have passed away, but you who are younger may live to see modern thought obtain supremacy over human minds: German rationalism which has ripened into Socialism may yet pollute the mass of mankind and lead them to overturn the foundations of society. Then "advanced principles" will hold carnival, and free thought will riot with the vice and blood which were years ago the insignia of "the age of reason." I say not that it will be so, but I should not wonder if it came to pass, for deadly principles are abroad and certain ministers are spreading them. If it ever should be so, do not, O believers, for a single moment despair, but rest certain that the Lord is about to do a marvellous thing in the earth, and that he will lift up once again the stone which the builders have again refused, and cause it to become more than ever the headstone of the corner. Never dream of defeat. Be calm amid all the din of controversy, for the hand which holds the gospel must win the victory. This is the Lord's doing and we shall see it.

IV. Let us now notice that THE EXALTATION OF THE REJECTED CHRIST COMMENCES A NEW ERA. For what saith the twenty-fourth verse? "*This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.*" We date from our Lord's resurrection even as the Jews of old counted from the night wherein they went out of Egypt. What is this day which the Lord hath made? I reply first, it is *the day of the gospel*. Through our Lord's exaltation pardon for the guilty is freely preached among all nations, and whosoever believeth in him hath everlasting life. Now is Christ exalted on high to give repentance unto Israel and remission of sins: now is he in the throne of power, that he may be able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him. Let us rejoice and be glad in him. How can we rejoice and be glad in him except by believing in him? Come, let us believe the gospel, the gospel of the once rejected but now exalted Saviour: let us put our trust in him, and then let us sing for joy of heart because we have a royal Saviour, an exalted Saviour, an almighty Saviour, in whose hands our souls are safe. The era of the gospel ought to be a time of gladness, for its favours are rich, its light is clear, its promises are abundant, and its truth is certain. To be unhappy now that Jesus reigns is to be ungrateful. It is a royal feast, let us eat to the full, and so honour the King and bless ourselves.

What day is this which the Lord hath made? Why, in the next place, it is *a Sabbath day*, the beginning of a long line of Sabbaths. The day in which our Lord Jesus rose from the dead is now sacred to rest and holy joy. Let us keep it with reverent love, and bless God for making it.

"This is the day the Lord hath made,
He calls the hours his own;
Let heaven rejoice, let earth be glad,
And praise surround the throne.

"To-day he rose and left the dead;
And Satan's empire fell:
To-day the saints his triumphs spread,
And all his wonders tell."

The world calls the Sabbath *Sunday*, do not let us turn it into *Cloud-day*. Certain good Christian people look upon the Lord's day as a season so solemn that it can only be properly kept by being as dreary as possible. Draw down the blinds, darken the room, chide the children, banish every smile: now we are getting sabbatic. Let us go up to the house of prayer like convicts exercising in the prison yard, and there let us be as decorously miserable as possible; let the preacher be as dull and as monotonous as though he had no subject to preach about but death and destruction, and must preserve an air of melancholy, or none would think him gracious. Such is not the teaching of our Master, nor is it according to his mind and spirit. Herbert well saith of the Sabbath,

"Thou art a day of mirth,
And where the week-days trail on ground,
Thy flight is higher, as thy birth."

It should be "a day most calm, most bright," fit to be called "the endorsement of supreme delight." It is a time of the singing of birds, for the

winter of our Lord's humiliation is over and he has risen from the dead; to-day we celebrate the glory of Christ in the highest heavens, as the elect of God and the corner stone of his church: surely it ill becomes us to go about with our hands upon our loins as if we mourned his victory and grudged his honour. No, let us clap our hands with exultation. "The Lord reigneth: let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of the isles be glad thereof."

Again, "This is the day which the Lord hath made." The resurrection of Christ commences *an era of triumph*. We have spoken of the gospel day, and the Sabbath day, but it is also a day of victories. As Jesus Christ rose from the dead, so will his truth continually rise from the sepulchre into which men may cast it. As he triumphed over the powers of death and darkness, so will his gospel triumph over all opposition. Whenever at any time your hearts are heavy, I would bid you stand at the open tomb of Christ, and recollect that he arose; and if he could not be holden by the bands of death, certainly neither himself nor his gospel can be holden by any other bands. His adversaries thrust his gospel into the tomb again; they proclaim that the old doctrines are effete, but as surely as Jesus our Lord liveth they shall see the truth revive again. Walk ye in patience, for the vision will not tarry. The day cometh when in yet greater power the gospel shall renew its youth, and the world shall assuredly know that the Lord hath done it. Let us rejoice and be glad that we live in an era bright with victories of the right and the true; we may have to fight for them, and wait for them, but they will surely come, and Christ shall reign for ever and ever. I would to God that the thought of the exalted Christ would be the beginning of days to some of you. This day began with sunlight, but at this hour it deepens into gloom; the skies are overcast, and a tempest is hurrying up. I trust that with my dear hearers it may be the absolute reverse, that if you began this morning amid clouds of doubt and showers of tears, you may see Christ exalted in the highest heaven, because he has offered for you his great atoning sacrifice, and may you look to him, and find clear shining after the rain, a great calm after a great storm.

V. I close by saying that THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST SUGGESTS A PRAYER. The 25th verse supplies us with it. "*Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord: O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity.*" First, it is a prayer for salvation. It may mean "God save the King: may Jesus live for ever," and in that sense we would make the heavens ring with it: but we will take it this morning to be a prayer for the salvation of men. Since Christ is the exalted and victorious Saviour, let us beseech him to save all those who are around us. Save them, Lord! Save them all! Save them now! Put it in the present tense. Ask for a display of the present saving power of our exalted Head. O Christ Jesus, Prince and Lord, save the sinners in Zion; we beseech thee save those who occupy these pews Sabbath after Sabbath, and hear about thee, but do not know thee. Save, too, the strangers that are within thy gates and are strangers to thee as well as to us. Save the careless, good Lord! Save the anxious! Save the seekers! By thy glory at the Father's side, we beseech thee, save men! Do you believe that Christ Jesus is at the right hand of God? If you do, all things are possible

with him, and he has promised to hear prayer. Hear me then ye thousands of Israel, as I entreat you now to breathe one hearty unanimous prayer to this effect—"Save now, O Lord, we beseech thee." Put the name of your child to the prayer if you please, or that of your wife, or father, or sister, or brother, but do put up the prayer to him who is enthroned on purpose to save. Save now, O Lord. Thou art no more despised and rejected, unveil thy glory by saving men. Thou could'st save even in thine agony: on the cross thou didst save a dying thief; but now in glory thou hast mightier power; therefore, O Saviour, save now. Will you not importunately urge that petition, O ye who know his readiness to hear? Sinners, will you not pray thus for yourselves?

Here now, as we sit together in this dense gloom, so unusual in the month of June, let us feel that the shadow of the Eternal is brooding over us, that the Almighty is now covering us with his wings. Do you not feel near to him? Be ye sure of this, he is very near to you: call upon him while he is near. In all probability we shall in a few moments hear his majestic voice rolling in thunder through the sky, and ere long we shall see the flash of his glittering spear. Let all this deepen our reverence, and prompt us to entreat him now to save us. The God that thunders at his pleasure is near: bow before him and trust in his Son Christ Jesus, and let the prayer go up, "Save now." Do not wait for to-morrow, nor even until the storm has passed over, but *now*, even now, seek his salvation.

The other half of the prayer is for *prosperity*. "O Lord, send now prosperity." This is what we continually need in this church. The prayer is in harmony with the whole passage. Since, Lord, thou hast lifted the chief stone into its place, be pleased to upraise other stones of thy temple into their places; fit them one upon another, and send a prosperous upbuilding. Lord, thou hast conquered all the foes of Christ, come and conquer the foes of thy church to-day. Lord, thou didst gather out a people to his praise and build up a church in the first centuries of Christianity, and then thy Son Jesus was gloriously the corner and head stone; come again and build up thine own church throughout all these lands, a church in which the Lord Jesus shall be exalted even to the highest.

"Send now prosperity." I pray you, beloved, join in this prayer. Pray that Jerusalem may have peace and prosperity, for they that love her and her peace have still felicity. Join in the supplication to the once rejected but now exalted covenant Head of the church, and the Lord will bless you for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm cxviii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—858, 118 (Version II., III.)

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE HIDING OF MOSES BY FAITH.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment."—Hebrews xi. 23.

As I observed to you in the exposition, the stress in these passages of sacred biography should be laid upon the words "by faith." The mighty deeds of heroes and the obedient acts of pilgrim fathers are only told to us because they spring out of faith. It is to commend the root that the fruits are mentioned. The children are named one by one that the mother may have the praise, for faith is the mother of all virtues. According to this book God estimates men by their faith, and "without faith it is impossible to please God." Faith is well pleasing to the Most High, but it is in proportion to its strength, for there are cases in which weakness of faith has evidently been followed by chastisement, and other cases in which strength of faith has been abundantly honoured. The more thou believest the more doth God bless thee. If thou believest with faith as small as a grain of mustard seed thou shalt be saved, for where there is faith there is salvation; but if thy faith be weak thou shalt miss many comforts, and only as thy faith shall grow and become strong through divine grace shalt thou be a receiver of the greater, deeper, and higher things of the covenant of grace. More faith is what we want, and the Lord is willing to give it, grace upon grace; he delights, especially, to strengthen the faith which we already possess by trying it, by sustaining it under the trial, and thus rooting and grounding it, and causing it to become firm and vigorous. Oh that we might so live evermore that the Lord might see in all our actions that they spring from faith. Then shall our actions as well as ourselves be always accepted of him by Christ Jesus; for the Lord hath plainly declared, "the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him"—that is, draw back from faith and run in the way of sense and feeling. Having begun by faith we are to live by faith. We are not to find life in the gospel and then nourish it by the law.

We are not to begin in the spirit and then seek to be made perfect by the flesh, or by confidence in man, but we must continue still to walk by the simple faith which rests only upon God, for this is the true spirit of a Christian. Faith is the freewoman's child, and it cannot live with merit, or self-righteousness, for this is the bondwoman's child, and the Scripture saith, "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman."

Now faith is in God's sight the very soul of all holy actions. That which is done without faith, even though, in itself considered, had there been faith at the back of it, it might have been accepted, yet it is not accepted without faith. As no sacrifice, even though it were an unblemished one, should be offered except with salt and with fire, and that fire a holy and heavenly fire, so nothing will be accepted of God except it be mixed with faith. Hearing is no hearing to profit if it be not mixed with faith in them that hear it, and doing may even stand in our way unless first of all we have attended to that work—that God-like work—that work of God—that we believe in him whom he hath sent. There must be faith; without it, it is impossible to please God, and he measures our actions according to the faith from which they proceed. I do again, therefore, very strongly say, I take the meaning of these texts to be not a laudation of the acts themselves so much as an honour put upon faith itself by the Holy Spirit. If you read of those who subdued kingdoms, that is not the point: others have subdued kingdoms, but it is "*who through faith* subdued kingdoms." If you read of those who escaped the edge of the sword; many have done that, but none are recorded here but those "*who by faith* escaped the edge of the sword." "Turned to flight the armies of the aliens:" many have done that by valour and strength; but to do it *by faith*, that is the thing. Many have endured scourgings and bonds and imprisonments, and have wandered about destitute, afflicted, tormented, but such sufferings are nothing unless they are borne by faith. I might almost quote the words of Paul, only altering them a little, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not faith, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not faith, it profiteth me nothing." Faith first, midst, last, must be the walk, life and triumph of the Christian. God gives to faith, God accepts from faith, God saves through faith, God keeps through faith, God sanctifies through faith, God perfects through faith. In all good things the power, life, and acceptance are "not of works, lest any man should boast," but by faith that all things may be of grace alone.

I come now to take up the instance of faith mentioned in the text, and as I do so I trust many here will be asking themselves the question, "Have I that faith which sees the invisible? Have I a faith which exercises an operative power over my entire life? Am I a believer in God, in his dear Son, in his most sacred word? Is that faith, real, practical, effective? If not, let me be sure that I am without God and without hope in the world. If he by his grace has given me the faith of his elect whereby I discern him, recognize him, act towards him as

the God that is and is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him, then am I accepted in Christ Jesus." Let us read our text again and then we will fall to, and gather instruction from it. "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment,"—their faith made them brave, and led them to preserve their little one.

I. My first observation about this brief narrative is this, IT IS A GREAT BLESSING WHEN IN A FAMILY BOTH THE PARENTS HAVE FAITH.

Paul in one text says, "By faith he was hid three months of *his parents*." Now you will please to notice that Moses himself, in the account which he gives in the second chapter of Exodus, ascribes this to his mother—"When *she* saw that he was a goodly child she hid him three months." Stephen in his speech before the Sanhedrim says, "In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months:" thus mentioning rather his father than his mother. Paul in the Hebrews writes, "He was hid three months of his parents," thus mentioning both of them. No doubt the apostle combined the two other inspired utterances. Do you wonder that Moses chiefly mentions his mother, Jochebed? I do not. What man is there among us but always delights to mention his godly mother, and though we would have no partialities about our parents, yet without controversy great is the mystery of a mother's love, and there are some points about it in which it makes a deeper impression upon the memory than a father's care. Prize fathers as you may, and will, and should, yet there is a tender touch that comes home to every man's heart when he thinks of his mother. It seems natural that Moses should when he wrote the account mention most of all his mother; and indeed, and of a truth, a mother has more to do with a babe than a father can have: in its tender infancy she is naturally its chief guardian. Perhaps, too, though we cannot be sure, Jochebed may have been the stronger believer of the two, and may have been the main instigator of the child's preservation. There are other instances in Scripture of the same sort, if it were so. Manoah would have been sadly put about if it had not been for his wife when she said, "If the Lord had meant to destroy us, he would not have showed us such things as these." The mother of Zebedee's children is often mentioned, while very little is said about Zebedee; and I know there are many instances now extant where if we had to write the religious history of families, albeit that the father is a good man, yet the mother, I was about to say, is a better, and would be the prominent actor in any family deed of faith. Well, let us imagine it to have been so. Jochebed, the wife, has the stronger faith. She is not a business person. She stops at home and looks after little Moses as she did after little Aaron and little Miriam in their time: the father must go out brick-making and earn the family bread, but mother at home, though not conspicuous but rather obscure, walks near to God and believes in him, and so becomes the very centre and pivot upon which the household rests and turns. It is often so, and blessed is that man who can say as much of his own wife. He will never be envious of her, but rather rejoice that, if he be Amram, God hath given him a Jochebed whom his son Moses will mention in years

to come even if he forgets his father. The husband will be well content to have it so, for the joy and peace which he receives from a godly woman of decided and vigorous piety will be an abundant compensation for being a little overshadowed in the memory of an honoured son.

But what a blessing it was, dear friends, that although Moses does not say his father hid him, yet he had his share in it, for Stephen says he was nourished three months in his father's house. The father was cognizant of it, and helpful in it, and hopeful about it: he was fully consenting, and agreeing, and assisting in all that the mother did. Would God it were so in all families. When husband and wife fit together in the things of God like tenon and mortice, then is the house well built; but when the mistress pulls one way and the master draws the other, when one is for Christ, and the other is for Belial, the house is divided against itself, and how can it stand? It is no marvel when both parents serve the Lord that their children are brought up in his fear, and become their happiness and their honour; and it is equally natural that if an ungodly father undoes all that can be done by a godly mother, the evil example of the stronger should be followed rather than the godly example of the weaker. If I address any husband here, who is as yet an unbeliever, I can but pray the Lord and join my prayers with those of his wife that he may be brought to know the Lord and rest in him. Both the parents of Moses believed, so my text says, and both acted by faith in disobeying the cruel order of the king. If they had not agreed about it, I do not see how Moses could have been concealed; but they both went together in the hiding of the child: and, dear friends, how well it will be if we all go together in the endeavour to bring our children to Christ. If our prayers are united, if our example is one, if our teaching is never contradictory, if both parents are with like earnestness seeking the salvation of their little ones, we may rest assured the promise will be kept, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

II. Our second remark shall be that **TRUE AND EVEN REMARKABLE FAITH MAY ACT IN A VERY COMMONPLACE WAY.**

What do we read? By faith they "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword," and so on, and so on. Why these are great things, and worthy of mention among memorable deeds. Yes, but this also is great in its way,—“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents.” It has no trumpet ring about it like stopping lions' mouths and quenching fires, and subduing kingdoms, but in God's consideration, from his point of view, the hiding of a little baby three months, may be as great an instance of admirable and acceptable faith as any of them: even turning to flight the armies of the alien may not be greater than defeating the malice of a king by saving a little child. But you say to me, "It was a very natural thing for a mother to do. When Pharaoh had given orders that all the male children should be destroyed, was it not natural enough that a mother should try to preserve her child's life? Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" Yes, yes, I know all that, and admit it; but still the Lord is not praising the

natural affection, but the supernatural faith. A very strong current is seen when nature and faith both set the same way ; yet it is not nature but faith which bears the sway. Sometimes faith has to go against nature, as in the case of Abraham when he was bidden to offer up his son, and then faith wins the victory ; and here, though faith and nature ran together and so made the current stronger, still the text does not say, "By the force of nature, by the natural love of parents for their child, Moses was hid three months." No, but they did it, "by faith"; so the Spirit saith, and he knows how they came to do it better than we do. We should say, "Nature led them to conceal the babe," but God says, "Faith led them to do it," and, in their degree, both are true. Nature prompted, but faith compelled, constrained, and enabled them to do what else their timidity would not have ventured upon.

But was it not a very simple thing to be doing by faith—the mere hiding of a child? Yes, but not so easy as it looks. Sometimes, I suppose, the mother said, "Hush! hush! hush! Dear child, you must not cry, whatever your pain, as Egyptian children may, for if some stranger should hear a child's cry it will be reported to Pharaoh's murdering officers, and you will die." Many, many times the instinctive cry must have been hushed by a mother's sedulous care : and when neighbours came to the door little can we tell the difficulty to put them off the scent, to keep them from knowing that there was such a little living treasure anywhere about the house. How often would callers in the daytime put the family into a fever, and in the middle of the night how readily would both parents start if someone knocked at the door, or loitered under the window. A rustling outside their poor little house would make them full of alarm. They were so distressed because they were breaking the king's law, and though they were not afraid of it they were afraid of the king's officers, who might come and seize their child. Yes, it was a very simple thing to do, just to hide away a baby,—keep it quiet, and not let anybody know about it ; but it was done by faith, and that makes the act divine. It was natural, it was simple, I admit all that, but when the Holy Ghost says, "By faith his parents hid him," it makes the simple and the natural action to glow with an unusual glory, like the bush in Horeb, which was only a bush, but yet the Lord appeared in it. And here is the point of it, dear friends, mothers, daughters, sisters, and all of you engaged in common life, do you not see how you can make faith tell about ordinary things? You think I preach by faith in this pulpit, and so I do, blessed be God ; but then you can darn stockings by faith, mend and piece and save, and make a little go a long way by faith. When you are ill you can lie and cough by faith without being impatient. You can keep your temper sweet with a provoking husband, or a disobedient child, by faith. You can do all sorts of things by faith. It rides the whirlwind, but it threads a needle ; it climbs up to the throne of God, and yet it stands, by a baby's cradle ; it can obtain the promises, but it can sit down and twist bulrushes, and boil bitumen, and stir a tar pot to pitch a little ark within and without with pitch, if it be necessary. There is nothing that faith cannot make noble when it touches it. You need not say, "I want to get away from my daily business, or from my domestic concerns, in order to show my faith." No, no ; stop where you are and show it. If a soldier

wants to be brave, and asks his captain what he can do, he will tell him, "You keep rank in the day of battle; you fire your gun when the word is given." In order to be a brave man you need not leave the ranks, nor run up to the cannon's mouth out of mere bravado. Soldier of Christ, just keep your place. Do the work appointed by the great Lord, trusting in him, and believing in his power to help you. So shall you make your life sublime, however commonplace it may appear to carnal eyes.

By faith these parents hid their child *three months*—a short time, perhaps, you will think. If you had to go through their anxieties you would reckon that it was the longest three months you ever lived. Three months the officers are after your darling child, and every time you look it in the face you are afraid it will be snatched away from your arms to be flung into the river. In vain, O mother, dost thou give thy child its daily food; in vain dost thou delight in its dimpled cheek and laughing eyes; for it must die. The crocodiles of the Nile must feast upon that beloved flesh. Such would her fears be day and night. Three months both parents must have been in great distress, and they could hardly have held on under such an agony of mind if it had not been by faith; but faith enabled them to watch during the weary days, which must have been crowded with tortures. Though the time seems short to you who never lost a child, and to all of us who never knew what it was to live under the heart-rending peril of having our infant murdered, yet it filled all the little world of a mother's and a father's heart, and what could be more? They bore the perpetual anxiety, and hid the child by faith; believing and hoping that God would have pity upon them.

III. A third principle which we will lay down is this, that FAITH WILL AOT WITH A VERY SLENDER ENCOURAGEMENT.

"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, *because they saw he was a proper child.*" As I read these words I thought to myself, "I wonder what parents do not see their children to be very proper children?" It seems to be the general rule that we have all of us—at least, all mothers—the most beautiful children that ever have been born. A slender reason it seems to be for hiding a child three months. Stephen says in his speech that the child was "exceeding fair"; and if you look at Stephen's speech you will see that the translators have put in the margin, "fair to God." So it may run, "when they saw that the child was fair to God." Now, I gather from that expression that the child was exceedingly beautiful, beyond the common run of children; that there was a charm about its features, a remarkable glory about its face, and something superhuman, probably, since it was fair to God. A *spiritual* air floated about the child's face, as if it bore some glimmerings of the glory of Sinai, of the wondrous shepherd-lawgiver who led the people forty years through the wilderness. In the babe's face there were prophecies of the man of God. Surely among them that have been born of women there has not been born a greater than Moses; and about him as a child there was a something so striking, so marvellously beautiful, that his parents were fascinated by him. Now, you can get a great deal of sunshine through a little hole, and you can see a very large prospect through a small glass, and it is as

it were a little space that the faith of Amram and Jochebed looked through, but they saw great things. Here was born to them a lovely child, an extraordinary child, a child fair to God ! Well, what did they say ? “ This remarkable child, surely was not brought into the world without some purpose on the part of God with regard to it. We will save it alive. This is not a child that can die or shall die ; we will save it alive. Pharaoh or no Pharaoh, such a child as this must and shall live.”

Perhaps they recollected that it was close upon the time when God had promised to deliver his people Israel. I should not think that believing Israelites had quite forgotten that God had told Abraham that they should be in bondage four hundred years, and they must have known that the time had expired within another eighty years ; and it is probable that the mother said, “ There is to come a deliverer. There is something about this child’s face which makes me hope that he will be the deliverer.” Jochebed’s faith that God would deliver his people was strong, and so she thought, “ Perhaps this is to be the champion who shall bring Israel out of Egypt. I will save him. I will save him. He shall be hid. Pharaoh shall not have him. All his edicts shall not drive me to expose him to death.” She looked for a deliverer and expected him to come : this was faith. O dear friends, if we had but such faith as this woman had, what wonders we should do, because we have not to look through a little glass, but have a wide window open before us. She had no Bible ; the man who was to write the first book in the Bible was her own little child. She had only oral traditions handed down from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and her fathers ; and she had only the fact that their child was exceedingly comely to cheer her in this special hope ; but she believed in God, and that enabled her to endure danger for her child’s sake. She believed God. Now “ God who in old times spake to his servants by the prophets hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things.” He has let the full glory of heaven blaze forth in the face of Jesus ; what manner of believers ought we to be, surrounded by such a light and nursed in the midst of such mercy. May God grant that our faith having so much encouragement may act strongly to the glory of God. But if sometimes you should seem to have very little to catch hold upon, dear brother, do not throw away that little. If you should only see some little token for good, some one little cloud the size of a man’s hand, still expect a shower of mercies. Even if all things should seem to be against you, and only one thing should appear to be for you, still draw sweet inferences from slender premises, or from what may appear to be slender premises, for truly the Lord is good and his mercy endureth for ever, and you may stay yourselves upon him.

IV. A fourth principle is clear in the text, namely, that **FAITH HAS GREAT POWER IN OVERCOMING FEAR.**

The text says they were not afraid of the king’s commandment. The king’s commandment made all Egypt tremble. It does now. The Egyptians are still the meanest of all peoples. The description given of them in the prophet holds good to this day. Everywhere all over Egypt you will hear the stick going. No other race of men would ever bear the bastinado as the Egyptians do ; the whole mass of

them working, practically, for one man, that he may spend a superabundance upon himself. As they are now so they have been from the beginning—a generation of yielding slaves, trodden down perpetually by greedy oppressors. The Israelites in Egypt had no doubt caught very much the spirit of the Egyptians, and the spirit of the Egyptians was the exact opposite of the spirit of a true-born Englishman. You and I rejoice that we are free. We are in the habit of discussing laws and criticizing statutes, and if there were an unjust edict passed we should not scruple for a single moment to break it. We should even feel a pleasure in putting our foot through an unrighteous act of parliament, for we have been trained for centuries in the habits and ways of liberty, and think and speak for ourselves; but it has never been so in Egypt, and specially was it not so in those days. Then they might well swear by the life of Pharaoh for they all lived by the permission of Pharaoh. They belonged to him—their lands and everything. Hence it must have taken a good deal for these two, son and daughter of Levi, to feel that they could go against the king's commandment. They had a right to do so. What right had Pharaoh to order them to destroy their children? It was their duty to break the king's commandment, and they did it because they had faith. I am bound to own, though I have commended the spirit of Englishmen, that there are a great many people even in this country who are very much ruled by what is called law. The church by law established will always enjoy a vast prestige because it has royalty for its head and the state at its back. To me its connection with the state is worthy to be called "the king's evil," but to others it seems a beauty spot. To the unthinking crowd that which is established by law must be right. Do the ritualistic priests come to us with legal authority? Well, then, who among us may dare to question their doings? Have certain rubrics been ordained by the Lords and Commons in parliament assembled? Has her Majesty given consent to them? Well, then, they must be proper and correct. A great many people have never got out of that style of thinking, and perhaps never will; whereas to me it seems to be a first principle of the Christian church that Christ's kingdom is not of this world, and that to all these great ones of the earth the only thing is to say, "Keep your hands off the ark lest you meet with the doom of Uzziah. Come humbly like disciples to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn of him, but do not set up to be legislators for his dominion, nor dare to intermeddle or make rules or regulations for the spiritual kingdom. We care nothing for your ordinances and regulations. You have no power here. Let Cæsar have his own, but he must not touch the things which belong to Christ." Now this woman by faith had got beyond the fear of Cæsar, the Cæsar of the age, the Pharaoh of the period. Whatever he might establish by law was just nothing at all to her. She broke away from it.

There was, no doubt, appended to Pharaoh's statute *a punishment* for anybody who should not obey the law. Perhaps four lives were in danger for the sake of that one little life—her husband, herself, Aaron, and Miriam, her daughter. If the officers enter the house and they find that little Moses has been saved it may be they will destroy the family, root and branch. That fear must have been upon her, but yet through faith she will run all risks, and so will all her family risk themselves that

this promising child whom they believe God has sent to them for a noble purpose may still live.

Now, dear friends, I want you if you have faith in Christ to manifest it by overcoming all fear of the consequences of doing right. It is right to obey God rather than man. God has the first claim upon us. Indeed God has the only claim upon us. We are to obey men for God's sake. But when man's authority overleaps itself and interferes with the authority of God then it becomes treason to the great King to obey even the greatest of kings. Parents and all in authority over us are to be obeyed in all things up to that point. It stops there. I pray that you may have grace to do the right thing, everyone among you, even if it costs you everything. If to be honest would make you lose your situation, if to speak the truth would bring you into trouble about your daily bread, do it and dare it. "We must live," says somebody. I do not know that. It might be better to die than to live under some circumstances—certainly better to die a martyr than to live a traitor—better to die for the right than to live in sin. You say, "We *must* live." I will tell you another "must." We must *die*, and it becomes us to live with that always before us, for we shall be called to "give an account for the things done in the body, whether they be good or whether they be evil." Beloved, may we have the faith that masters fear, so that we can go through the world fearless of popular opinion, fearless of ungodly censure, fearless of the little circle around us to whom some are altogether slaves. May we fear God and therefore be no more afraid of man's commandment. Be just and fear no consequences. If the heavens themselves should shake we would do no wrong, nor tell a single lie to prop up the skies. Let the sun, moon, and stars come down sooner than we should ourselves fall from our integrity. May faith give us such a fearless walk as this.

V. But now, fifthly, and very briefly, I want you to notice that FAITH IS OFTEN DRIVEN TO GREAT SHIFTS.

The mother of Moses had to hide her child. I have no doubt if she were here, and if her husband were here, they would have a long story to tell of the things that happened; how often their hearts were in their mouths, how frequently poor Amram was in a cold sweat because one of his companions with whom he worked talked of going home with him; how that prying neighbour of theirs, who always wanted to put her finger into everybody's dish, tried to find out what there was that made Mrs. Jochebed keep at home so much; how they were afraid even of their own little children lest they might in their play talk of their little brother. What fear was upon the whole family, lest discovery should lead to destruction, we may guess from their hiding the babe. The mother was put to great shifts to hide her child, and she used all her wits and common-sense. She did not put her child in the front room, or carry it into the street or sit at the open door and nurse it, but she was prudent, and acted as if all depended upon her concealing the babe. Some people suppose that if you have faith you may act like a fool. But faith makes a person wise. It is one of the notable points about faith that it is sanctified common-sense. That is not at all a bad definition of faith. It is not fanaticism, it is not absurdity; it is making God the grandest asset in our account, and then reckoning according to the soundest logic. It is not putting my hands into boiling

water with the impression that it will not scald me; it is not doing foolish and absurd things. Faith is believing in God and acting towards God as we ought to do. It is treating him, not as a cipher, but as a grand over-topping numeral in all our additions and subtractions. It is realising God: that is what it is. And in that sense faith is the truest reason, spiritualised and lifted up out of the ordinary sphere in which godless men choose to indulge in it: it is sanctified reason, enlightened from on high.

The mother wants the Lord to preserve her child, but she knows that God would have her to be the instrument of it, so she hides him; and when she can no longer hide him then comes that little business of making an ark. Faith is inventive, but at the same time faith always likes a precedent. I imagine that the mother of Moses thought of making that ark, and pitching it within and without, because she had heard about Noah's ark. Her faith made her love the memorial of the Lord's working salvation in days of old. She had not a book to read, but she had been told that story about Noah's ark. "Well," said she, "I will have a little ark for my little Noah, and as I cannot otherwise save him, I will act as Noah did when, being moved with fear, he prepared an ark for the saving of his house." Brethren, it is always safe for faith to think out her plans, but if she can discover one of God's plans and adopt it, then faith is more confident. There are always precedents if you look for them. You can find a Noah's ark somewhere, and make a little one after that model. Of course your ark cannot be as big as Noah's, but then if it were it would be too big for little Moses; he would be lost in it. A little ark will do for a little Moses. Go upon your own scale, and work after the model which some servant of God was taught to set you, and as you have the same God to deal with, and he has the same love to you as he had for the saints of old, you will find the old plans work exceedingly well. Some of you young folks always want something new of your own. Well, after a good deal of trying all sorts of new things, I always find out that if my new plans succeed they turn out to have been old ones. There is nothing new under the sun that is worth trying. As sure as ever you strike out a new path you will find, if it is the right path at all, that somebody went that way years before. One has wittily complained of the ancients that they have taken all our original thoughts, and all our original plans, and carried them out before we had an opportunity to claim them. But still the faith of Moses' mother was inventive. She invents the ark, yet does she borrow from the precedent of former days. She considers the days of old, and her spirit makes diligent search, and she acts after the way in which men of God had acted before.

A critical commentator complains that the faith of these parents was somewhat weak. It made them go part of the way towards putting their child out of existence by putting him out in the ark and leaving him among the bulrushes. Well, I do not know anything about that. I am always satisfied with not knowing what I do not know; that is to say, if I see that God says nothing about their weak faith, I think we had better not say anything about it either. By faith they did what they did, and they did the best thing possible; and if there was weakness, as probably there was, still, as a painter when he was sketching a favourite

prince took care to put his finger upon an uncomely spot in his face, so does the Holy Spirit when he speaks of these godly parents omit all mention of defects in their faith. He praises their faith, and it would be presumption on our part to modify his verdict. May we have as much faith as they had when we are tried and we shall have no need to fear.

VI. Lastly, FAITH'S SIMPLE ACTS OFTEN LEAD ON TO THE GRANDEST RESULTS.

"Take care of that child, Miriam. Do not let him cry, for fear anyone should hear." Now that everyday act of Miriam in nursing the babe, the mother giving the child the breast to stay its cries, the father watching the door, and all those little things were small matters, yet how wonderfully they conduced to the great future by which Pharaoh's power was broken. The whole history of Israel rested upon hiding that little child. The whole history of Israel did I say? Think of the names that hung upon the child's life: Aaron, Joshua, Samson, Barak, David, Solomon, and even the divine babe of Bethlehem and the whole history of Israel were connected with Moses. Wrapt up in that child was the history of the world, for in the Jewish people all nations were blest, and blessing comes only to us Gentiles through the Jew. Greater blessings are yet to come by the selfsame channel. Oh yes, she takes care of Moses and hides him, and her reward is that Moses lives, and in due time there he is ready for his work, waving his rod over the fields of Zoan, working plagues and wonders; and there he is by the dark sea drowning all Pharaoh's host and then leading the people to the mount of God, even to Horeb, and bringing them to the margin of the promised land. There he is, and he could not have been there if by faith his mother had not hid him three months. You do not know all you are doing when you do little things in faith. Brothers and sisters, do not despise domestic duties, but bring up all your children, your little children, in God's fear: correcting their little habits, bearing with their little ways, teaching them their little hymns, all lead up to great results. Do not, I beseech you, despise and sin against the child. You know not what is in him, or her, or what in God's great book of history those tiny hands are yet to write. If you have no children but have some other sort of work to do for God, do not think little of it. Grand events hinge on little incidents. Great wheels turn on little axles. There is a tiny part to each machine of unutterable importance. You never know the infinity of the influence of a word. To the wise man nothing is little; to the fool nothing is truly great. Make all things great by doing them by faith.

So there I finish. Have you faith in God? Are you really believing in him? Are you trusting in Jesus? Have you accepted his way of salvation? My dear friend, if you have not you are going the wrong way to work in everything. If I were to go into a country where there was a king, and I took note of everything except that king and the king's laws, I should soon get into trouble. If he were a king whose power was everywhere present, and yet I never recognized him, I should certainly make a failure of my life in his dominions. You come into this world where God is, and he is omnipotent to bless or curse you—will you disregard him? You come under certain laws of his, and if

you take no note of them or him, but live only seeing what these eyes can see, and only knowing what comes under the cognizance of your senses, you will lead a bankrupt life, and fail at the last. Why, sirs, I dare to say it concerning myself that the grandest object to my thought always is my God in Christ. I have most excellent and admirable friends here who love and esteem me, but I dare not lean on one of them : I must lean upon God alone. He gives me many mercies and favours, but I know what it is to have been without them, and to have been just as happy as I am with them ; and now I know what it is to live above them, and just live upon God. I could bear to let all go if you leave me my God, but if there be no God then am I of all men most miserable. I have learnt to live on him, to trust him, and to run to him with all my troubles, and I find that he always sustains me. I go to him with all my joys and he keeps me steady under them. He is all in all to me, and I can and do only say this much about myself that I may recommend my Lord to you all. I beseech every young man and every middle aged man, and even every old man here, to taste and see that the Lord is good. I cannot make some of you poor people out : how can you live without God when you have so little comfort of a temporal sort ? I cannot make you rich people out : how can you live without God when he is so good and kind to you ? How can you forget him who daily loadeth you with benefits ? You seem to me to get the husks and not to look for the kernels. You are living on the outside skins and never suck the juice of joy. The soul of life is to live to God. The peace, the deep, the heavenly rest, which the soul gets must always come by a living faith in Jesus Christ. I say this because there is not one among you who, if you have this faith, may not exercise it whatever your calling may be. You may drive horses, you may measure calico, and weigh up sugar, and do all by faith to God's glory ; you may be on the Exchange, or you may be a book-folder, or a porter, or a nursery governess, or a plain cook, but everywhere faith has something to do, and you can show the power of faith in common life. God grant you may have faith wrought in you by the Holy Spirit. God is true, why do you not trust him ? God is true, why do you not believe him ? The Christ of God is gracious, why do you not accept him ? He loves to save sinners, he receives all them that come to him. Why do you not come to him ? God grant you may, for Jesu's sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Exodus i. 22,
ii. 1—10 ; Hebrews ii. 23—29 ; Psalm lxii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—23 (Version II.), 690, 678.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE CHIEF PHYSICIAN AND THE CENTURION'S
SERVANT.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 30TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him."—Matthew viii. 7.

"And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee."—Matthew viii. 13.

THE centurion of Capernaum is an example to us in a matter which bears upon the collection appointed for to-day, which, you know, is for the hospitals. This good soldier cared for the sick, and was anxious for the recovery of his palsied servant. Every employer should take a sympathetic interest in his domestics when they are ill, but in some cases this is not thought of. "If they cannot do their work, they must go"; this is too often the language used about them, and they are got out of the house as soon as possible. I do not say that masters and mistresses are often cruel, but I fear that some of them are none too kind. Among religious persons kindness towards man should be as manifest as piety towards God. The centurion had done what he could to benefit religiously the people among whom he dwelt, for the elders of the Jews said, "He loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue." But he combined with a desire to benefit the soul a sincere desire for the welfare of the body; and this was apparent in the interest which he took in his "boy," his personal servant, or young valet. God has joined body and soul together, and they ought not to be sundered in our deeds of charity.

This captain's sympathy with his suffering valet was shown by practical action. He did not say that he felt for him, and then go off to the guard-room and keep clear of the sick youth; nor did he merely stand and watch him in his pain, to see how he would fare, but he aroused himself, he went abroad, he called together the elders of the city, he summoned his choice friends to him: in fact, he made the whole circle of his acquaintance feel a sympathy with him concerning the illness of his body-servant. Then he sent these elders and friends to the best physician of the age, and as I think also followed at their heels himself: he used the

surest means within his reach, and appealed to him to whom none ever appealed in vain. From the centurion I gather that we must not be content with loving our people and building them synagogues, but we must also build them hospitals and dispensaries. Find them preachers by all means, but find them surgeons too. We may not forget the soul, but we must also remember that the soul dwells in a body liable to many disorders. We may become just a little too spiritual, so spiritual as to spirit away the very spirit of Christianity. God grant us grace to be as tenderly considerate of suffering humanity as this centurion was, and we probably shall be so if we have as strong faith and as deep humility as he had.

Our Lord himself also in our text sets us an example, which may plead with us on behalf of hospitals to-day ; for he was here upon the high errand of our redemption, yet did he not consider it at all derogatory to his divine purpose to be continually engaged in healing disease. For three years he walked the hospitals : he lived all day long in an infirmary ; for all around him at one time they laid the sick in the streets, and at all times physical evil in some form or other came in his way. He put forth his hand, or spake the word, and healed all sorts of maladies. This our Lord did very readily, for it was part of his life-work. "I will come and heal him," said he, for he was a physician in constant practice, and would be round at once to see the patient. "He went about doing good," and in all this he would let his people know that he intended not to bless one part of man alone, but the whole of our nature, taking upon himself not only our sins, but our sicknesses. Jesus means to bless the body as well as the soul ; and though for this present he hath left our body very much under the power of sickness, for still "the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness ;" yet he foreshadows in his healing miracles the resurrection, when he shall raise us perfectly healed, and the inhabitant shall no more say, "I am sick." Every restored limb, and opened eye, and healed wound is a token that Jesus cares for our flesh and blood, and means that the body shall share the benefits of his death by a glorious resurrection.

As in our Lord's life his teaching was always connected with healing, he would have the church also take a very deep interest in the bodily sorrows of the people as well as in their spiritual needs. It will be a very great pity if ever it should be thought that benevolence is divorced from Christianity, for hitherto the crown of the faith of Jesus has been love to men ; it is, indeed, the glory of Christianity that wherever it comes it erects buildings altogether unknown to heathenism—hospitals, asylums, and other abodes of charity. The genius of Christianity is pity for the sinful and the suffering. Let the church be a healer like her Lord : at least if she cannot pour forth virtue from the hem of her garment, nor "say in a word" so that sickness may fly, let her be among the most prompt to help in everything that can assuage pain or assist poverty. So ought it to be, for "as Jesus was, so are we also in this world." Did he not tell us, "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you." We cannot too diligently study his character, for he has left us an example that we may follow in his steps. Since we cannot practise the healing art, let us give support to those

whose whole time is spent in it that they may be able without fee or reward to watch over the sick poor; and let none among us act the churl when the blind, the halt, and the lame cry to us as they did to our Master of old.

This said, I desire to pass on to my subject, which is of a spiritual kind. I want you to mark the development of the faith of the centurion, and side by side with it the growing manifestation of our Lord's power. Both are seen in the narrative.

The centurion had evidently heard about Christ; perhaps the healing of the ruler's child had satisfied him that Jesus is the Messiah. He had attended at the synagogue. I cannot doubt that a man who had built a synagogue would be sure to go to it; and there he had learned of the Coming One, foretold by prophets and expected by saints. This Anointed One was to work wonders among mankind, and especially wonders of healing. Thus he had gathered that Jesus was the Christ, and he believed in him as having power to heal his sick servant.

The first practical result was that he humbly sent the elders with the urgent request to "come and heal him." He believed that Jesus, if he were present, could restore the dying youth. He had thought it over, and his faith had reached as far as that of Mary and Martha when they said: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." In effect he said, If thou wilt come here, great Master, my servant will not die. He therefore cried, "Come and heal him;" Observe that our Lord's answer was exactly proportioned to the measure of faith in the prayer: "I will come and heal him:" "Thou sayest, come and heal him; I reply, I will come and heal him." So far so good: but the captain's faith is to be seen in a still clearer light. He has been considering the matter still further, and his humility leads him to feel that he ought not to expect Jesus to come to his house. Why should he trouble the Master to leave the crowd and to cease preaching, to come and attend to his servant? He is grieved to think that he should have proposed a visit: he feels himself unfit to entertain one so holy and so great, and therefore he sends off his friends post haste to offer humble apologies, and to beg the Master not to come. He has at the same time advanced in his belief in Christ's power, for he says in effect, "There is no need that thou shouldst come: only will it, merely say the word and the healing is wrought. For I also am a man under authority, deriving authority from being under it, and I have only to say to one soldier go, and to another, come, and my will is done. I have no need to execute my own wishes personally, for my will governs my troop and each man is eager to do my bidding. So, great Master, stay where thou art, go on with thy other work, and only will to bless me and it will be enough; thy desire will be accomplished without fail. Oh thou great Emperor of all the forces of the universe, bid thy triumphant eagles fly this way, and the foe will vanish before thee." Here was growing faith, and side by side with it was a clearer manifestation of the Master's power. Our Lord Jesus there and then wills that healing power should go forth; he moves no further towards the house where the palsied patient lies, but rather he turns round, and in obedience to the wish of the centurion he walks away; yet the miracle is wrought, the paralytic child has risen from the bed, the captain's heart

is gladdened, and those who came to plead stand in the house to praise the Lord. Awe-struck by the finger of God so near and so manifest, what could they do but bless the Lord, who had visited his people?

That is the story, and it proves that our Lord Jesus Christ is omnipotent in the physical world. He can do what he wills, and though at this present time we do not appeal to him for miraculous cures, it were well if we trusted him more upon that point; for all of power which dwells in medicine, and all of skill which is found in physicians, is only effective through his tender mercy. We know, however, that our Lord is omnipotent in the moral and spiritual world: and there to-day he displays his sublimest feats of power and wisdom. We are going to think about this, and may the Holy Spirit make the meditation useful to us.

I. The first thing I invite you to consider is **THE PERFECT READINESS OF OUR LORD JESUS** for works of mercy. The centurion was concerned about his servant, just as you and I are, I hope, to-day concerned about certain poor souls which lie paralysed by sin. We mourn over them, and if we could heal them we would gladly suffer any self-denial or suffering. If we could bring our neighbours to Christ, it would be the utmost joy to us; their perishing souls are to some of us as a burdensome stone, a load heavy to bear. How can we endure to see them die? The mass of working men around us, ay, and the majority of our wealthy neighbours are under the power of the wicked one. To them the things which are seen are the only objects of their thoughts. They will not regard the gospel of Christ, or eternity, or judgment, or heaven, or hell. The privileges with which our country is so largely endowed are treated as if they were of no value whatever: Sabbaths, Bibles, the gospel, and the throne of grace are despised. This is mournful indeed! Brethren, we must go to Jesus about this evil thing, and it may help us to do this if we now think of his great willingness to bless servant or child, or any other person whom we may bring before him in prayer.

That willingness we shall see first if we notice that *he did not cavil at the pleas which the Jewish elders urged* on behalf of the centurion, though they must have been very distasteful to his mind. They said, "He is worthy for whom thou shouldst do this": that was not the right style of pleading with him who came to save the lost and bless the undeserving in the freeness of his grace. The elders said, "He loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue," and so on. Poor souls, they were doing their best, and using the kind of argument by which their own hopes were sustained. Our Lord regarded the spirit of their intercession rather than the form in which they offered it; and though the plea, laying so much stress upon human merit, might very well have warranted him in saying, "Hold your peace, for you are damaging rather than helping the case," yet our Lord was so willing that he raised no question. From afar he read the heart of the centurion and he knew that the good man's advocates were altogether misrepresenting his views and feelings. The last thing in the world that the lowly-minded soldier would have pleaded would have been personal worthiness. His own words were, "I am not worthy." Had he known that his advocates would have talked in that fashion he would never have allowed them to speak on his behalf. If the centurion could have been there he would have said, "Your words cut me to the quick, for I am not worthy."

What little I have been able to do I cannot boast of. I have done no more than I ought to have done. Do not speak to my Lord in such a style." But Jesus was so willing to go that he put up with all the blunders of the elders, and responded to their request, "I will come and heal him." Beloved, very likely you and I make quite as great mistakes when we pray : we fancy we pray very correctly, but I wonder what our Lord thinks of our prayers. Surely he has often to pick out the meaning of our hearts from among the errors of our lips ; but so willing is he to bless us, that if there be first a willing mind it shall still be accepted, for he rejoiceth to hear every prayer which seeks healing for sin-sick souls.

His willingness is seen, next, in the fact of his so cheerfully *granting the first prayer in the form in which it was put*. They besought him that he would "come and heal" his servant. Now, that was not exactly the best form in which to put it, certainly it was not that which commended itself to the maturer thoughts of the centurion. Why should Jesus go ? He could heal the patient without moving from the spot. Was there not a considerable measure of unbelief about the elders' prayer ? Yet our blessed Master took the prayer just as it was, and he seemed to say,—"I see the measure of your faith, and I will give you the blessing as you are able to receive it." The Lord is very generous to come down to our capacities ; if he were always to act according to his own divine standard we should be greatly dazzled, but we should be afraid to draw near to him. He condescendingly lays aside the splendour of his majesty to act as well as to speak to us after the manner of men, and then we see the sweet voluntariness of his grace, and the cheerful willingness of his spirit to do us good. If we cannot receive a blessing in any other than a second-class way, we shall have it in the way in which we can take it ; as our faith can get no further, he will do the wonder according to the manner in which our scanty thought is able to conceive and ask and receive. Oh what a willing friend we have in Christ. He bows the heavens and comes down, meeting the weak in his weakness and the fainting in his faintness ; answering prayers, not only according to the riches of *his* glory, but according to the poverty of *our* infirmity.

Notice further, that when the centurion sent a fresh deputation of his choice friends to say to the Master, "Trouble not thyself, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof," *our Lord did not quarrel with the change of the prayer*. Some people would have said, "What is it that you want ? First, I am to come, and when I am almost there I am met with a request not to come,—what do you mean ? This is not respectful, and I will not come." Our gentle Jesus spoke not so. Oh, no ; such talk might come from you, and from me, who are so great in our own esteem, but never from him, because he is so much greater than we are. He thought not of himself, nor his own dignity. Let us imitate his meek and quiet spirit. When you are trying to do good you will often be put about by the whims of those whom you would benefit. You will find that when you do what people ask you they are not satisfied : many adults are like sick children, who are always cross and fretful. We must humour these poor hearts, as our Lord did. He was so willing to bless that he seemed to give *carte blanche* to those

who asked of him : " Yes, you shall have the blessing which way you like, so that you are but able to receive it. It shall be given to you according to your faith." Our Lord shifted his movements without pressure and would go to the house or not, just as the centurion's faith might lead him to pray. Blessed, for ever blessed, be our most gracious Saviour who never wearies of us, nor takes offence at our childish changes.

The Saviour's willingness to bless this centurion's servant was very manifest from the fact that *he did not impute an ill motive to the centurion* when he bade him refrain from visiting the house. There was no mistrust about our Lord. He knew too much both of man's evil and of the sincerity of those in whom his grace was placed to suspect and to interpret harshly. Ignorance and selfishness are mistrustful, but love thinketh no evil. If there are two ways of understanding a sentence, my brothers, and one is better than the other, always read it in the kindest way, if you can. Never put hard constructions upon words and actions. You and I might have said in the case before us, " You see he does not want me in his fine house. He is a centurion and thinks much of himself, and I am wearing a poor garment, and therefore he does not want me in his villa to disgrace his halls. He is a captain, a man in authority, having soldiers under him, his pride forbids my approach, and therefore I will have nothing to do with him." But no, it was not in the Master's heart to think thus bitterly, but as at the first he had said, " I will come and heal him," so now when genuine humility requests him not to come, he turns about, but works the miracle all the same. Brothers and sisters, our condescending Saviour must be very willing to bless men, since he takes the true meaning of their prayers where others would write a harsh interpretation. Be not afraid to approach him however unworthy you are, for he will put the best construction upon your broken petitions, and interpret them always to your gain. His disciples may severely criticize one another and may criticize *you*, but they have learned no hard words in his company.

Nor did he demur at all to the comparison which the centurion made. " I also," said the centurion, " am a man under authority." If you were to read that expression with dark spectacles, you might make a great deal of mischief out of it. A caviller might say, " How dares he even for a moment compare himself to the Son of God ? How can he draw a parallel of which he is one side and the blessed Lord the other ? What impertinence ! " Brethren, our Lord was no critic. No, among the brotherhood of fault-finders you never see the Christ of God. When he has to deal with sincere people, he picks no holes, imputes no motives, and dwells on no mistakes. The centurion did not wish to make his metaphor go on all fours, and our Lord did not treat him as if he did. Many a time have some of us had to suffer from this mode of attack, but never from our Master, nor from those who imitate him. He took the meaning of the centurion's illustration, and he admired it ; for indeed it was a grand and beautiful idea, to set forth our Lord Jesus as the great Emperor of the universe to whom all things are under rule, and to whose faintest word each form of force, whether good or evil, is sure to render obedience. He showed that he had rightly estimated Christ, and enthroned

him as he should be enthroned in the place of unlimited sovereignty and power. The Master did not, therefore, for a moment demur to anything he said. No, but the prayer had been offered that the servant might be healed, and the prayer was granted: the faith had been exercised which believed that Christ could heal, and that faith was honoured. Our Lord did exactly as the prayer requested him. He came when he was asked to come; he stayed when he was asked to stay. He spoke the word when he was requested to speak the word; he healed when he was asked to heal. In all things he yielded himself entirely to the centurion's wish, to show his cheerful alacrity in benefiting the suffering boy and in answering the master's prayer. Come, then, dear friends, we may be quite sure of our Lord's sympathy, though we are not praying about a sick boy, but pleading for our sinful neighbours. He loves sinners better than we do, for they have cost him more than they have ever cost us, even if we have spent nights in watching and prayer on their behalf. To him it is committed of the Father to save the lost, and his zeal to accomplish the work never flags; and therefore we may be sure that our pleadings and efforts will touch a kindred chord in his heart.

II. Secondly, an equally interesting topic is before us in THE CONSCIOUS ABILITY OF OUR LORD. You have seen his perfect willingness, now behold his boundless power. I do not know how it affects your minds, but that sentence from the lip of Jesus, "I will come and heal him," has a strange majesty about it to my soul. It is the word of a king wherein there is power. Perhaps the most majestic word that was ever uttered was "Light be:" no sooner was it heard than the eternal darkness fled, and light was: but surely this is scarcely second in grandeur, if second at all; its sound is as much the voice of the Lord as that which scattered the primeval shades: "I will come and heal him." Yet this royal and powerful word was spoken as a matter of course; our Lord Jesus did not deliberate, but the healing word flowed from him as naturally as the perfume from the flowers. "I will come and heal him,"—it is an utterance resolute, true, clear, comprehensible, unconditional, and *to him* natural, and common-place, though to us divine.

It shows, dear friends, our Lord's conscious ability to deal with all manner of evil, since *he was not at all puzzled by this intricate case*. Almost any other physician would have felt some measure of perplexity. The case is described as that of a man sick of the palsy and yet "grievously tormented." How could that be? Paralysis can hardly be connected with acute pain. It brings numbness and so ends sensation, at least such is my impression. Some interpreters think the disease must have been a form of tetanus, but there is no mention of tetanus in either account. It was a palsy, and yet he was "grievously tormented." I know nothing about it, but I have read that there is a period in which paralysis may turn into apoplexy, and the patient may suffer extreme agony. If so, this may explain the mystery. However, though the case perplexed many, it did not perplex the Lord Jesus, for he said, "I will come and heal him." Now, my brother ministers, have not you and I a great many cases coming in our way which tax our experience and make us feel at a loss? I have had during this week to deal with several tempted ones whose difficulties have put me to a non plus, or

would have done so if I had not borrowed from my Lord. Some experiences are a tangled skein, we cannot follow the thread, and so far as we do follow it knots and snarls are our chief reward. See how Jesus sweeps away all debates with "I will come and heal him." All the complicated phenomena of human disease he comprehends, and along the dark labyrinth of human experience his mighty word makes a way for itself: undisturbed, and even undelayed, the eternal energy enters the soul, for Jesus says, "I will come and heal him."

Neither did the extremity of the case at all dishearten him, for this poor man was ready to die, so Luke tells us, just on the verge of expiring, yet Jesus says, "I will come and heal him." It does not matter to Jesus what the stage of the disease may be. A common physician would shake his head and say, "Ah, you should have sent for me before. I might have done something at an earlier date, but the sufferer is now beyond all human help." Poor souls are never beyond the reach of the divine healer, and so he says without a word of doubt, "I will come and heal him." Ay, had he been dead, Jesus could have said and could have done the same. "I will come and heal him" is a word for all emergencies. Beloved, let us never hesitate to hope in prayer because the persons for whom we plead are such great and horrible sinners, and so very far gone in crime. So long as they are not actually in hell let us firmly believe that Christ can save them; and, verily, if we can believe in our great Saviour with mighty faith, we shall yet hear him say of many a reprobate and outcast, "I will come and heal him."

I again remark that *our Lord speaks of this healing as quite a matter of course*, for his language is after the manner of speech which men use when they know that they are *au fait* at their work, and can do it as soon as they have it before them. A person asks a workman to repair a lock or a window, and he answers, "Yes, I will come and attend to it." He means that he can do it, it is quite in his line, and it is as easy to him to do it as to come. So can our blessed Master save a sinner as easily as his Spirit can come to that sinner, and we all know that his Spirit is a free Spirit, and like the wind, bloweth where he listeth. Jesus could come to the centurion's house, and he could as easily heal as he could come. "I will come and heal him:" the work is simple enough to the divine Redeemer, to whom nothing is impossible. No disease of sin can baffle the Saviour or even cost him special effort to eject it. Look to him, ye ends of the earth, and prove for yourselves that none are beyond his mercy's reach. Oh that all who hear me this day would make a like trial of his healing might.

As for the method of procedure, our Lord in his conscious power *treats the modus operandi as a matter of indifference*. He grants the first petition as it was presented to him, and will come and heal him; but when he is requested not to come he quite as willingly says, "According to thy faith so be it unto thee." He could heal as well at a distance as near at hand. Present or absent, it was all the same to him. A touch, a word, a thought could do all that was wanted. It was so, and it is so still, for our blessed Lord saves sinners in all sorts of ways. He can save them in their pews, under the preaching which they have heard so constantly, or he can meet with them in their lonely chambers, reading some godly book; or he can wound their hearts by a loving

word spoken during a walk with a friend. We have known him call men by his grace right out of the paths of sin, wounding them with secret arrows when they were at ease and secure in the service of the devil: where no means of grace as we call them were present, yet have sinners been smitten at heart and have been turned to God by that heavenly influence of the Spirit, which remains the supreme miracle of the present dispensation. Saul of Tarsus was not on his knees in prayer, but hastening to shed innocent blood, and yet the Lord brought him down and made him seek salvation. Beloved, our Lord knows how to reach inaccessible persons; they may shut *us* out, but they cannot shut *him* out. This should much encourage us in pleading for souls which are out of our usual line of action. When we plead with Jesus, let us never bind him down to ways and means of our own choosing, but let us leave to him the method of salvation.

Jesus was so conscious of his power that *you never find him uttering an expression of wonder, or manifesting the slightest surprise when his will is done, and a notable miracle is wrought.* No, but he did wonder at the centurion's faith, and on another occasion he marvelled at the people's unbelief. It is no wonder to Christ that he saves sinners, he is so in the habit of doing it, and he is so able to do it. You and I will wonder, and throughout eternity we will declare that wonder, singing with rapture and surprise the lovingkindness and pardoning power of Christ Jesus; but *he* does not wonder. Virtue goes out of him almost unconsciously, for he is so full of power that he can bless on all sides and scarcely know it. Even as the sun shines north, south, east, and west, and never wonders at its own shining; or as a fountain sendeth forth its sparkling drops, and never stops to admire itself, or to marvel at its own flashing flow, so doth Jesus readily, easily, out of his very nature scatter pardon and salvation on all sides. He marvels at our faith, he marvels oftener at our unbelief, but to him his own power is not a thing of wonder at all. Beloved, I want you to get fast hold of this thought if you can, and I beg you to hide it away in your hearts,—that Jesus Christ is beyond measure able to save. We do not half believe it; we think we do, but we do not even a tithe believe it, for when we meet with a rather hard case we are ready to give it up in despair. Despairing persons we too soon leave in their gloom; and even melancholy men and women we are shy of; we wish we had never seen them, instead of believing up to their point, and believingly interceding until we see them happy in Christ. If we meet with a horrible blasphemer, or a foul liver, or a bloated drinker, we feel quite out of our latitude and in the land of monsters, whereas it is with such cases that our Lord is much at home, and we ought to pray most about such persons, and to be most confident that the gospel was meant to meet their grievous ills. Is there not a great Saviour for great sinners?

III. We shall close by a third equally interesting point, of great practical value. I have spoken of our Lord's willingness and power; now we will note THE ABIDING METHOD OF OUR LORD JESUS.

The first method mentioned here was "Come and heal him." Jesus then went about doing good, but he does not now vouchsafe his bodily presence, or give physical tokens of his being near to anyone. If any say to us, "Lo here," or "Lo there," let us not believe them, for Jesus is

not now upon the earth ; He hath gone up on high. We do not now pray, "Come and heal him," in the sense of expecting a vision or revelation of Christ after the flesh to those whom we love. We hope that he will come one day a second time, and heal the sicknesses of this poor world, but till then we know him not after the flesh, neither do we seek any personal coming. The other and permanent mode of our Lord's action was that he should speak the word, and so perform the cure. "Say in a word and my servant shall be healed." That is the style of our Lord to-day and throughout the whole of this dispensation. The healing energy of Jesus is now seen not by his personal presence, but by the power of his word in answer to the prayer of faith. This is henceforth his fixed and abiding method of cure : the word rendered effectual by believing prayer. Now, I want you to notice that this mode of operation is outwardly similar to the Lord's usual and natural way of exercising his power in nature and in providence. Though clearly it is one of the highest forms of supernatural action, it may not at first seem to be so. Look at this:—when Jesus stands at a bedside, bows over the sick child, and touches his little hand, and he is healed, the deed is notable, and is a great miracle ; but will it not seem to you to be even a greater display of power, if possible, that Jesus should remain at a distance, and not see the suffering one, nor even speak so as to be heard in the darkened chamber, and yet his mere will shall be able to quicken life and restore health? It is a very clear display of supernatural power is it not? This healing by volition, or by a single word? Yet it does not seem so striking, somehow, to half-opened eyes when you look at it from the grosser point of view ; for this is just how the good God is working every day in nature and in providence, achieving his purposes by his silent will, and by those echoes of his creating voice, which linger among us still. When but a little while ago your fields were bare, and your gardens desolate, if the Lord had suddenly come forth in awful glory, and caused snow and ice to fly before him, and had then benignly touched the valleys and the hills, and covered them with grass and corn, you would have exclaimed, "This is a great miracle" : but in truth it is an equally great display of power that the deed is done, though by less glaring processes. The will of the Lord transforms the clods of the valley into an army of wheat ears and clover balls ; his quiet wish reddens the clusters of the vineyard and ripens the fruit of the garden ; is not this also a marvel of power? What though the Lord has not come forth riding upon cherub wings, nor has he spoken audibly in commanding sentences, yet the secret energy of the eternal word is evermore going forth to give us seedtime and harvest, cold and heat. What diviner form of miracle is to be desired? I believe that when we rise to the possession of a fully developed faith, we shall see ourselves to be daily compassed about with the omnipotence of God, and shall look on every tiny blade of grass, and upon the insect which balances itself thereon, and the dewdrop that decorates it, as being quite as manifestly the finger of God as when Nilus turns to blood, or the dust of Egypt becomes flies. To the believer miracles have not ceased, but the common course of nature teems with them.

The power of the word in answer to the prayer of faith is now our

Lord's way of blessing, and this method exactly suits the wish of true *humility*. Humility says, "I am not worthy that God should do anything for me which would attract attention to me or make me seem honoured above others." The lowly soul hears of one who was saved through a dream or a vision, and he feels that he is not worthy to be thus favoured. No, my friend, and you need not wish for it, the word of the Lord is enough, and that word is nigh you at this moment, in your mouth and in your heart, you have but to hear and your soul shall live. If I were pleading for the conversion of a sinner I should feel hampered by my own unworthiness if I believed that salvation necessitated a bodily manifestation of my Lord or some extraordinary display of power before men's eyes; but if my Lord will save by his word only, then do I venture to ask with confidence. Here is no parade of power, but quiet divine energy, and this the meek of the earth delight in.

I am sure that it pleases *faith* better than any other way. Oh that the power of the word might be displayed at this time. Oh my Lord, how I desire of thee that thou wouldst save thousands, and I would be glad if it were done without me, without any of thy servants, if thou wouldst only say in a word and by thy Holy Spirit cause a nation to be born in a day! Certain professors eagerly pine for a great stir: they will not believe that the kingdom of God prospers unless thousands crowd into our assemblies; and unless great excitement reigns, and all the papers are ringing with the names of famous preachers. They like it all the better if they hear of persons being thrown into fits during the meetings, or read of men and women falling down, or screaming under excitement, and I know not what besides. They can believe in Christ's power if there are signs and wonders, but not else. That is going back to "come and heal him." But we are content to abide by the second mode. Can you not believe that by each one of us making the gospel of God to have free course, our Lord can effectually save men by his word? Quietly, without observation, without sign or wonder, Jesus will bless believing testimonies and answer believing prayers. Strong faith is well content with the Lord's settled and usual mode of action, and rejoices to see him save men by his word in answer to the prayer of faith.

It is perfectly reasonable that we should expect our Lord to display his healing power in this way. What the centurion said was full of forcible argument. He said, "I am a captain of a troop. I do not have to go about from place to place to do everything personally. No, I remain in my quarters and issue orders, and I am sure of their being carried out. I say to this one 'go,' and he goeth, and to my servant 'do this,' and he doeth it." Is it not clear that the far greater Captain of our salvation does not need to come forth bodily in order to save any; his word will suffice. Give thine order, O Immanuel. Speak to the powers of darkness, and the captive sinner shall be free. Speak, and the human will must yield to thee, and the human heart must receive thee. Is it not so? My brethren, we do not believe enough in our Lord. I come back to that; we do not believe enough in what is so perfectly reasonable. If we will but speak our Master's word, and let it go forth, and bear sway, with less and less of our own word to cripple and hinder it, souls must be saved. Do you not believe in the plain preaching

of the glad tidings? Do you not believe in the rams' horns? O children of Israel, do you despise the rams' horns, and do you long for horns and chariots and battering rams and mighty engines of war? Remember Jericho, and how by God's own appointed though simple means the huge walls rocked to their fall. Will not the Lord's own means suffice you still? Oh, believers, do you want anything this day except the simple preaching of the gospel? If so, you are departing from the point wherein your faith ought to remain, since still it pleaseth God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. "The world by wisdom knew not God," and never will know God. Trust not philosophy, but stand by the old old story, and pray the Master to work by it as in former ages. You want no new word to be spoken, only let the living word be filled with power, and souls will be healed.

Now, if any one here will try in his own case this divine method of healing, it will succeed in his instance as in that of the centurion's servant. If you, dear hearer, will believe the power of Christ and trust him to save you, you shall certainly obtain eternal life, and that at once. Can you heartily believe in Jesus as you find him revealed in Scripture? Can you be content without strange feelings, without remarkable terrors, without dreams or visions? Can you be content simply to trust your Saviour? You shall be healed immediately, ay, this very moment, ere this shower has ceased the showers of everlasting grace shall have fallen upon you. You must not ask the Lord to come by some singular feeling within you, but just to speak while you are hearing, and the miracle of grace will be wrought.

Let me add once more: if you who are converted long to see others saved you will be wise to keep to the established method. Pray, believe, and then expect the Lord to work by his own word in answer to your prayer. The centurion rose to this method; he began lower by desiring a personal visit, but he grew up to this plain, simple, yet glorious way. Can you not do the same? Seek no marvels, but test the power of the gospel upon your friend. Do not ask the Lord to go out of his way, but beseech him to apply his word with power to those whose eternal welfare lies near your heart. Bring your loved ones under the sound of the gospel and entreat the healing Lord to put forth his power thereby, and your desire shall be accomplished. Alas, if the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? If he were to come now, and ask us all to put into the collecting box what faith we have, when he opened it, would it come to the eighth part of a farthing? Yet every man among us that is a believer ought to have an inexhaustible treasure of golden faith. Lord, we believe; help thou our unbelief! Lord, increase our faith. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matt. viii. 5—18;
Luke vii. 1—10.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—257, 422, 381.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A SACRED SOLO.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him."—Psalm xxviii. 7.

THIS passage has, to my mind, a peculiar charm. I do not know whether it breaks on your ear with like pathos and power. To me it seems charged with softness and sweetness, like some gentle strain of tender music. Let us read it again. "The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him." Methinks I see a battle raging furiously, yet he whom it most concerns, after having displayed his prowess and fought valiantly, steps aside, and, sitting down in a quiet place, bomb-proof and almost out of sound of the cannons' roar, thus talks with his heart. He forgets the raging strife: he is expecting a joyful victory. He knows his weakness, but he has caught a glimpse of the divine strength which is guaranteed to him. He is trembling, perhaps, from the toil of the fight, and yet he rests as one insensibly subdued to settled calm and mild composure: he rests in God. In like manner, I want you, dear friends, to get out of the crowd a while this evening, and take shelter in a quiet place. Forget just now the various troubles of business, the domestic cares which often harass you, and the inward conflicts which vex your souls. Whatever there may be to disturb, distress, or distract you, let it alone. Now, for a while, revel in that sweet peace which God alone can give, the peace of God which passeth all understanding, and say unto your soul, "The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him."

The sentence, you will notice, divides itself into three parts. The first tells us of *an assured possession*—"The Lord is my strength and my shield"; and the second speaks of *a definite experience*—"My heart trusted

in him, and I am helped." There are no "ifs," no "buts," no suspense of the soul midway between hope and fear: he speaks without a trace of hesitancy, for he tells out his own actual experience. The third part of our text very properly closes with *an expressed emotion*; a very deep emotion it is—"My heart greatly rejoiceth." And then, you see, the inward emotion is interpreted in a most proper fashion by an audible utterance—"With my song will I praise him."

I beg to call your studious attention to the remarkable form of this verse. There is a pair in the case of each of my divisions, and the pair in each case consists of inward and outward. Notice, "The Lord is my strength," that is inward: "My shield," that is outward. "My heart trusted in him," that is inward: "and I am helped," that is outward. "Therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth," that is inward: "and with my song will I praise him," that is outward. It is by no means trifling to note these arrangements in the structure of sacred poetry, for there is a lesson to be learned therefrom: it teaches us that truth and beauty are to be linked together, and that to be holy we need not be uncouth. Full often we may observe a beautiful form and an admirable fashion in the language which embodied the thoughts of the inspired psalmist. If we look at them long enough and meditate upon them fondly enough, we shall discern a symmetry in all his hallowed compositions which charms the taste, rivets the attention, and helps the memory. The sacred poet served the Lord with his best powers, reckoning nothing to be good enough for the Lord whom he loved so well. Slovenly preaching, doggerel verses, and discordant singing ought to be avoided, if possible, and our devotion should have the sweetest possible expression.

I. Let us begin with the first division of our text, and may the Spirit of God give us full faith to accept it in all its depth of meaning. We have here A SURE POSSESSION,—“The Lord is my strength and my shield.”

With a double grip he takes hold of the divine covenant. “The Lord is *my* strength and *my* shield.” He gets a two-handed grasp of the God of salvation. A touch of the hem of the Saviour’s garment will heal; what divine virtue, then, must stream into a man who can hold with both hands—not merely the garment’s hem, nor even the garment itself, but the Lord himself. “The Lord is my strength and my shield.” Perhaps some of you cannot give the double grip; then give the finger’s touch, and it will save you. But do not be always content with that touch; ask to lay hold upon Jesus, and say, “I held him, and I would not let him go.” Ask to grasp him, like Jacob at the brook Jabbok with the brave resolve—“I will not let thee go except thou bless me.” Nay, get beyond that, and pray to have Paul’s hold of Christ, which was so strong and firm that he said, “Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?” Both hands take hold, for the psalmist sees a double blessing; he knows also that he has a double want; and so he takes a double grip. “The Lord is *my* strength and *my* shield.” Were you to leave out the “*my*,” repeated again and again in this verse, how the sense would be spoiled. Let us try it—“The Lord is a strength and a shield.” Well, that is very true, but of what avail is that to me? My comfort must come from the fact that “the Lord is *my* strength and *my* shield.” Faith matured by experience,

faith strengthened by the promise, faith invigorated by the Holy Ghost, who is the nourisher as well as the author of it—such faith is fired with sacred energy when it dares to lay hold on God, and say, “The Lord is *my* strength and *my* shield.” This is blessed work. God grant to each of us to know how to perform it, and to this end let us seek the help of the Holy Ghost, without whom we can do nothing.

Notice what it is that David lays hold upon with his two hands. “*The Lord is my strength and my shield*”: it is not the Lord’s promised grace, nor is it the bounties of providence, which he has bestowed on me, which I regard as my strength and my shield. It is not even the Lord’s work in my soul, neither is it the assurance of my faith, nor yet the ardour of my love, that has become my strength and my shield. It is not the Lord’s book even, though its inspired oracles can enlighten the eyes, fortify the heart, and refresh the spirit. It is not the Lord’s attributes of power and faithfulness and watchfulness; but it is JAH JEHOVAH himself who is strength and shield to me. Now, he that layeth hold on God hath done a daring deed, at which even “the man greatly beloved” might stand aghast, were it not written, “Let him take hold of my strength.” Oh to say, “My God!” There is more eloquence in those two words than in all the orations of Demosthenes or Cicero. All the genius, learning, and penetration of the heathen world could never teach us how to claim the Deity, and take possession of the God of the whole earth. What can we discover in the philosophy of Pythagoras, Aristotle, or Socrates that will compare with this? The man who can truly say, “The Lord is mine,” hath an inheritance which death cannot wither, which space cannot compass, which time cannot limit, which eternity cannot explore. He may be poor in pocket-money, as I suppose the owners of large estates occasionally are; but he is infinitely rich, for he hath *real property*, and an absolutely indefeasible title to it. He may *feel* distressingly weak, but he is infinitely strong. He may account himself to be empty, but he hath all things and abounds, he, I mean, who can say, “The Lord is mine.” Come, my brother, be bold enough to look into your privilege. Think of it? What if you could say, “The world is mine”? It will be consumed by fire. What if you could say, “Heaven is mine”? Yet if the God of heaven were not there, it would be a wilderness. Oh, beloved! if you can say, “God is mine—Father, Son, and Spirit are mine,” what do you want more to gratify your eager quest for joy unspeakable? Come, can you conceive satisfaction more substantial than to know of a surety that God is your Father, your Redeemer, your Sustainer, your All,—your All in all? Do you wish for a better song than this—

“So I my best Beloved’s am,
So he is mine”?

Can you imagine any sweeter music than the minstrelsy of a love so tuneful, touching as it doth the strings of that mysterious instrument, the soul? Is not this the climax of all wishes, all passions, all desires, all delights? We hail thee, son of Jesse, as the harmonious music of thy sublime psalms breaks on our ears: but oh, thou Son of David! we adore thee that thou hast taught us to take up the strains as our own. We ourselves have felt *in fact* what the sweet psalmist sometimes spoke

in figure. We, as thy willing followers and thine acknowledged disciples, do now, by right and rescript which thou hast given us, appropriate to ourselves the poems, parables, and prophecies which once vibrated in dark sayings from David's harp, as precious utterances concerning heavenly favours to which thy sovereign grace has made us to be fairly and fully entitled.

Unhappy you who cannot call this God your God, whatever else you may have to glory in; but happy you who know that God is yours, however little of this world's store may fall to your portion. Thus have we considered the double grip, and what it lays hold upon. Let us not pass on till we have imitated the grasp of faith and appropriated the infinite treasure. May the Holy Ghost enable us.

Notice under what aspects God is thus laid hold of. *Inwardly*, first, as we have said, as our *strength*:—"The Lord is my strength." Brother, do you know how strong you are? If you have said, "The Lord is my strength," I challenge you to say how strong you are. "Ah, sir," say you, "I know how weak I am." That I will also take liberty to question; for albeit that you know yourself to be as weak as water, you are weaker yet—weaker than even your despondency has dreamed. "I know I am nothing," say you. Yes, but you would not even have had grace enough to know you were nothing if God had not given it to you. To be nothing is ours by nature; but to know that we are nothing and to confess that we are nothing is a gift of his grace. Brethren, we are emptier than emptiness, and more vain than vanity. We may tax language and use extravagant hyperboles, but we shall never be able fitly to estimate our own utter insignificance. We are weakness itself, hampered with the conceit of power; and yet if we can say in truth, "The Lord is my strength," we cannot estimate how strong we are, for there is no measuring omnipotence. Come, let us consider the matter, and let each believer speak personally. He who made the heavens and the earth is my strength. He who fixes the mountains firm so that they start not from their places in the day of tempest, when the cedars are breaking, is my strength. Although he will one day rock heaven and earth, and before his presence all creation shall flee away, yet he is my strength. These are but the hidings of power, but, truly, all the force reserved and lying latent in the Almighty bosom is engaged for his saints, and is my portion. Whatever omnipotence can do—and that is a wrong expression to use, for omnipotence knows no frontier or confines to its sphere of possible action) is ours. All that God has done is but little in comparison with what he can effect when his arm shall be bared to complete his mighty purposes; yet all the possibilities that pertain to God belong to his people. "The Lord is my strength."

With Jehovah for our strength we obtain a matchless capacity for endurance? It is marvellous how much a believer can bear when the Lord sustains him. "Out of weakness we are made strong." See you that bruised reed over yonder? It is fit emblem and fair picture of a man alone. You cannot trust the weight of an ounce to it, it bends under its own slender weight, even though there be no pressure to force it down. That is you, dear brother: that is you, dear sister. But see you that strong and potent column which bears upon it a huge roof or

an iron way across which will thunder thousands of tons? That is yourself when God is with you; yea, you are stronger than that, for nothing shall be able to break the man to whom God is his strength. "I could not bear that," say you; "I know I should be crushed." What are you thinking about—the loss of that favourite child? Thinking about the death of your dear husband? God grant that you may not have to suffer it. The death of a wife?—the loss of all your goods, the cruel wounds of slander, or the desertion of friends? Are all those trials likely to befall you, and do you say, "Alas, I could not live if such afflictions should overtake me"? My dear friend, if you can say, "The Lord is my strength," you can bear anything and everything. You could bear a martyr's death if the Lord should be your strength. He could make a stalk of wheat to bear up the whole world if he strengthened it; and the faintest and most trembling child of his that ever whispered a prayer, he can make to bear the greatest griefs and the heaviest trials without the slightest repining, for his Spirit can infuse unconquerable patience into the believing heart. Of course, the power to endure depends upon the strength imparted, and not upon the inherent fortitude of the individual. It does not make much difference what the struggle or what the sorrow if we have strength sufficient. A little child with a small basket may be overloaded; while his father with ten times the load to carry will walk briskly, and whistle as he carries his burden along the street, thinking lightly of his lading. The increase of the burden is not the thing to groan about if there be a proportionate increase of strength. Emigrants have told us that they could labour with less fatigue in Australia than they could loiter in England. Whether that be so or not, assuredly it is easier to toil with divine aid than to rest without it. "As thy days thy strength shall be." Mark that. If the Lord shall heap the load upon your poor shoulders, he will impart courage to your mind, and vigour to your spirit, so that you shall suffer all his righteous will and find your soul thrice blessed in the endurance. "The Lord is my strength;" then we can, like Samson, slay the lion and find honey in it, or smite the Philistines and divide their spoil.

"Let me but hear my Saviour say,
 'Strength shall be equal to thy day!'
 Then I rejoice in deep distress,
 Leaning on all-sufficient grace."

If the Lord be our strength, our inward strength, we can *do* anything. At times we faintly reckon that we cannot get through our task; for the tale of bricks appears to be doubled, and straw is hard to find. Look up; for the Great Taskmaster always bestows upon us special ability when he demands of us peculiar service. Peradventure we are called to a high and solemn engagement of more than common responsibility. We shrink with timidity and put our mouths in the dust at the thought of it, and say, "Who am I, and what are my qualifications, that I should be summoned to speak for God, to act as his ambassador, or to fill a post of such vast importance? I am but a child: how shall I undertake an enterprise at which venerable sires might well be daunted?" But the Lord's answer is, "I will be with thy month. I will be thy strength." Well, then, we may cry with David, "I will speak of thy statutes before

kings, and will not be ashamed." If the Lord make us strong, there is no office upon which we may not venture, there is no duty we cannot perform, there is no sacrifice which we cannot cheerfully offer, there is no battle in which we cannot prevail.

Very likely I may be addressing someone who does not know or appreciate the faith which thus fortifies the feeble followers of Christ. Art thou a very strong man, and dost thou boast of thy strength? Friend, the strength of Samson served him a sorry turn when he was without his God; let his blindness warn thee. Another friend, conscious that he is a man of education and culture, doubts not that he can make his way in the world. Oh, sir, Solomon's wisdom was of poor account when he forgot the statutes of the Lord, pursued the fashions of his times, and suffered altars to be built to the strange gods of his wives whose sensual fascinations took away his heart. There is no strength of muscle or of mind but in God. "God hath spoken once: twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God." Blessed are they who look for strength to the strong, for wisdom to the wise, for safety to the Saviour. They shall say, in the words of our text, "The Lord is my strength."

David, in giving two grips, laid hold upon God as to *the outward manifestation*: "He is my strength and *my shield*." Looking back upon the past, I trust that many of you can say that God has been your shield. It is he who protects us from known adversaries; from the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil; from all the arrows that fly by day, and from all the terrors that haunt us by night. From adversaries of whom we know, and against whom we would be ever on our guard if we could, God is our shield. "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper." He who hath made the Lord his refuge, and the Most High his habitation, shall be safe; no real evil shall happen unto the just. "The Lord is my shield." Nor is he alone our shelter from open enemies; he is our guardian against those dangers which we wot not of. How many perils may have menaced your personal safety, your domestic happiness, or your fair reputation, of which you never knew! Thank God for unknown mercies, as well as for hair-breadth escapes. Often in travelling you may be within an inch of death and never be aware of it. Our gratitude to God may be stirred when we perceive a danger and escape it; but are we not even more beholden to him when we do not even perceive the peril, and reach our journey's end, or awake in the morning, or live through a year, without sickness, without calamity, without alarm? Without violently imagining mischiefs or nervously inventing perils, we may soberly judge that dangers have frequently hovered around us even in the calmest hours, and from all these we have been preserved, because the Lord is our shield.

It is the greatest comfort to feel God's Spirit within you making you strong; but it is no small joy to know that God is round about you, making you safe. "He is my shield." Knowing as we do that our adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion walketh about seeking whom he may devour, and that he may be perhaps trying to seize upon one of us at this very moment, our security from his hostile attacks is this—The Lord is our shield. Satan will only waste his arrows against the eternal buckler. There may be a plot formed against you by a cruel adversary whose hatred is unknown to you; but fret not yourself with fear of hidden

dangers; let them lie where God permits them to conceal themselves; do not unearth the foxes nor stir up the young lions, for you are safe in your simplicity. Is it not written that "the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den"? "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel." Though earth and hell should blend their malice, they are safe whom God protects. The close designs and crooked counsels of those who conspire against the saints shall all be foiled, for there is One who frustrateth every evil device and taketh the wise in their own craftiness. "Where would you hide yourself," said one to Luther, "if the elector of Saxony should withdraw his protection?" He smiled, and said, "I put no trust in the prince of Saxony. Beneath the broad shield of heaven I stand secure against Pope and Turk and devil." So he did: and so do we. If we have but faith in God, we can sing, in the language of the text, "The Lord is my strength and my shield. He strengthens me within and he protects me without. What more do I want?"

Before I leave those first two sentences, I want you to notice that this is a matter of fact, a fact which many here present can attest: "The Lord is my strength and my shield." It is not a pretty speech that we have selected as an appropriate motto for a retrospect, nor is it a piece of sentimental religious poetry in which fancy counterfeits Christian experience; but it is a positive fact, to which full many of us who have been tried and tutored in the pilgrimage of life can bear our personal testimony. "The Lord has been *my* strength": at this moment I set my hand and seal to that statement before you all. I should have proved myself to be weakness itself in many an emergency had not Eternal power upheld me: I should have been far from calm resolution, and drifted near to madness; not firm and steady, but frail and faltering, had he not interposed on my behalf, and kept this heart in the hour of trouble. Is not the same confession due from each of you? You have waded through your trouble, dear sister: you have escaped from that dilemma, my brother; and do you not ascribe your deliverance to the Lord who strengthened you? Come, now, where else did you get your strength from? You cannot trace it to any other than a divine source. Has not the Lord been your shield? Have not some of you been in positions in which no one else could have guarded you? Perhaps your own fault has placed you in predicaments out of which you could never have extricated yourself had he not stretched out his hand and plucked your feet out of the net. Then you said to your soul, "This is no fiction. This is the finger of God." It is right-hearted sincerity, and not wrong-headed enthusiasm, which prompts us personally to avow—"The Lord is our strength and our shield." We can say it as deliberately as the miser might say, "The bank is my confidence, my money is my trust"; or as the merchant might say, "My wealth is on the sea, my ships bring me in my yearly income," or as the mother might say, "My children are my joy." We can boldly publish it, and challenge all gainsayers, for it is really so, "The Lord is our strength and our shield." Beyond doubt or question this is an assured possession.

II. Now, have patience with me while I endeavour, in the second place, to expound to you A DEFINITE EXPERIENCE. It is related in

these words: "My heart trusted in him, and I am helped." Here, too, we have both inward and outward, as I told you before—"My heart trusted in him," that is work done indoors, within the soul; "I am helped," that is mercy received outdoors, openly and actually.

Notice the scrupulous loyalty of the believer whose entire confidence is centred in God. "'My heart trusted.' I did not say '*I* trusted,' as one who makes a profession with his lips, but rather with strong conviction and profound emotion, '*my heart* trusted.'" It is truly shocking to see people stand up, and recite a creed, to the truth of which they attach no importance. They say or sing, "I believe this, and I believe that," and as they repeat the words prescribed for them, they superstitiously turn in a certain direction. But happy is that man who, turning east, west, north, or south, does *in his heart* trust—does in his secret soul believe. There is no believing worthy of the name except heart believing. If your head believes a thing it is of small consequence; but in soul-saving faith the heart is so believing as to trust, and the mind is so assured as to be at peace. "My heart trusted *in him*. My poor heart fluttered in the time of trouble, it was agitated, it was distressed, for all its visible refuge had fled away; but at last I said, 'I must hang upon my God, and to him I must cling.' In very despair of all things else I cast myself at the foot of his throne. My heart trusted *in him*." Has it been so with you of late? Has your heart been trusting in God? That is a very strong expression of the prophet when he speaks of the heart going a whoring from God. The language is vehement even to coarseness; but it is none too forcible, for it involves the commission of a spiritual uncleanness when the heart trusts any other helper than God. "My heart trusted *in him*." Oh, it is so easy for the heart to get trusting in itself! And he that trusteth his own heart is a fool. It is frightfully easy for the heart to rely upon man, as we know right well! Did you ever notice the middle verse of the whole Bible? It is the eighth verse of the hundred and eighteenth Psalm: "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man." The comparison will not bear a thought, the preference is infinite: for confidence in man will betray your hopes, but faith in God will enrich you beyond your expectations. May our heart always keep to that—trusting God; trusting in God alone. "My heart trusted in him."

In the next clause of the sentence, which is *the outward manifestation* of the inward experience, we have the result: "I am helped." If I had been writing this psalm of my own head I think I should have written it thus: "My heart trusted in him, and I *was* helped"; for it is a rule in composition that if you bracket two sentences together you should write them in the same tense. But, as old Master Trapp says, faith has no tenses, because faith deals with a God who has no tenses except the present, for his name is "I AM." Our faith does not say, "I trusted in him, and I *was* helped." No: she has all former mercy present before her eyes, and she sings, "I am helped." Nor does faith say, "My heart trusted in him, and I *shall be* helped." Perhaps the needed help has not yet arrived, but she is so sure that it will come that she cries, "I am helped. Am I as poor as I was before I prayed? No, I am not, for I have obtained the blessing I asked for. I appear to be as weak as I was before I trusted him, but I am not, for the Lord is my strength; and,

having trusted in him, I *am* helped." I wish we lived more in that blessed present tense in which God dwells.

"He fills his own eternal '*now*,'
And sees our ages pass."

Now, brethren, let all the past of God's mercy come up to your memory, and let that be a part of the "*now*"; and then just take, as it were, a spring, and bound forward into the future—ay, leap right across life, as though it were a narrow rivulet, into heaven, and put the eternal future into the present "*now*," and sing as our sweet poet does—

"Lo! a '*new song*' is in my mouth,
To long-loved music set:
Glory to thee for all the grace
I have not tasted yet."

"I am helped." I have now the good I crave. By faith I realize it as a present possession. I am helped: I *am* helped. The past lives in my gratitude, the future lives in my confidence, and both alike meet in the present, and my soul is glad. "My heart trusted in him, and I am helped."

You must notice, reverting again to the words of the text, that this confidence was, from first to last, confidence in God, and therefore was it honoured with a gracious result. "*My heart trusted in him, and I am helped.*" Many and many a time we have been obliged to say, "My heart trusted in So-and-so, and I am *deceived*"; but here it is, "and I am *helped*." Sometimes it happens; "My heart trusted in such an one, and I am disappointed, though not deceived. He would have helped me, but he could not." But here it is, "My heart trusted in him, and I am helped," All has happened according to promise; there has been no failure of faithfulness, no breach of covenant, no forgetfulness, no delay. I am helped sufficiently, punctually, continually, and so I ever shall be helped till toiling and travelling days are over. Glory be to God for this.

Dear friends, have all of you who are Christians attained to a Christian experience? Doctrine, you know, is very important; it is well that you should learn it, understand it, and adhere to it; but doctrine is only the truth in which you are instructed, and avails you little for growth in grace until you experience the power of it in your own souls. Do you know why so many people run away from the truth as it is in Jesus, and take up with strange conceits and new-fangled notions? It is because they have no inward experience of the old truths. Let a man once have a deep experience of the evil of sin, and I will warrant you he will feel his need of a Saviour and the necessity of an atonement made by blood. Let him have an experience of the power of the blood upon his conscience, the peace that comes out of substitution, and he will cling to the cross, he will be ready to die for the cross. He has such joy rising out of it as he never found elsewhere. I am obliged to cling to the gospel, for if it be not true I am a lost man: I must hold fast to it, for there all my hope is fixed, and if it be taken away, my sun is quenched, the well of my joy is dried up, and life becomes a lingering death. But, beloved, an experience of those blessed truths which God hath revealed

to us by his Spirit writes them where they cannot be erased; not upon the tablet of the brain, from which they may be effaced, for men forget, but upon the tablet of the heart, from which they cannot be obliterated, for men do not disclaim that which has become a part of their inward consciousness, and which God has made dear to them as their lives. May you all have such a definite experience as the text sets before us. The Holy Ghost will work it in all the saints.

III. Lastly, here we have A DECLARED EMOTION: "Therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him." Here, again, is the inward phase, you see—"My heart greatly rejoiceth"; and then there is the outward embodiment of the internal feeling—"and with my song will I praise him."

Behold a heart rejoicing with a sacred and intense delight! Some people's rejoicing is but skin deep. They laugh; their face is surfaced over with smiles, and their mouth bubbles up with silly glee. To my mind there is hardly anything more sad than the frequent laughter which exposes a vacant mind. The moment company has gone this volatile mirthfulness subsides, and the jolly companions resolve into solitary individuals, dull each one and dreary, far enough from being happy any of them. You may, perhaps, have heard of Carlini, one of the most celebrated clowns of the beginning of this century, a man whose wit and humour kept all Paris in a roar of laughter; but he himself had little share of the cheerfulness he simulated so well and stimulated so much. His comedies brought him no comfort. Though a professor of mirth, he was a victim of melancholy. He consulted a physician; and asked him for a prescription to relieve his lowness of spirits and habitual despondency. His physician gave him some medicine, but advised him by way of recreation to go to the theatre and hear Carlini, whose fun and frolic were of such repute. "If he does not fetch the blues out of you, nobody will." "Alas! sir," said he, "I am Carlini." And so, doubtless, it hath often happened that men make glee for others when they are full of gloom themselves. The face smiles like summer, but the heart is freezing with the cold of winter. Not so the man who has laid hold on God. "*My heart rejoiceth*," he says, "*my heart rejoiceth*." Nay, he puts in the word "*greatly*." "*My heart greatly rejoiceth*," as if it were as full of joy as ever it could be; as though it throbbed and danced joyously with a fulness of delight. "*My heart greatly rejoiceth*"; and Christian men can say this whenever they lay hold on God, even though they are surrounded with a world of trouble. We know sometimes what it is to wear a sad face with a glad heart, just as some others are wearing a glad face with a sad heart. Blessed is the man whom God hath taught greatly to rejoice: let him indulge the holy humour to the top of his bent.

What, now, is the outcome of this sacred, soul-satisfying joy? He says, "With my song will I praise him." Whenever you feel exceedingly glad in the Lord, be sure to tell it out. This is one of the emotions which ought never to be concealed. When I have been preaching among the Primitive Methodists, at the very mention of joy in the Lord, I have heard them call out "Hallelujah." In Wales I have heard the "Gogoniant"—glory be to God. We do not commit such improprieties here. Do we? We are too quiet and proper to transgress the rules of enforced decorum: and yet, sometimes, it might be the most natural

thing in the world for a Christian to feel that he could not hold his strong emotions in stiff restraint, but must shout aloud, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name." Do you think, dear friends, we sing enough? I do not think we do. The world is very pleased with singing of a certain sort. Tuneful airs are tacked on to trashy words. What foolishness we hear in the popular songs of the day. I have been quite unable to understand the sense when the sound has jingled in my ears. When I have asked, "What does it mean?" nobody has been able to interpret, or at least to make me comprehend it. To them it may have appeared like a clever ballad; to me it seemed mere empty doggerel. Well, if they are not ashamed to sing their bacchanalian songs, and sometimes to make night hideous with their choruses, surely we need not be ashamed to sing the songs of Zion, and to sing them with spirit too. Good woman, why don't you sing? You would handle that box-iron just as well if you sang a psalm. You could mend those children's clothes quite as cleverly if you would sing a hymn. Good friend carter, you could crack your whip as you walked along by the side of your pair of horses in the dray and yet hum the while a favourite tune. To get alone and sing some sacred melody by yourselves is very refreshing. My father had, years ago, a servant who was always singing, and when he asked her why, she said that it helped to keep bad thoughts away. I knew a boy who was so fond of singing the praises of the Lord that his employers would let him go out on the Common sometimes to give vent to his vocal powers, for he sang rather too much and too loudly for a quiet house. I love to see young Christians full of joy. It is good, sometimes, to get away and have a stave to yourself, as much as if you said, "I am not singing for any one of you, but I am singing to God." I listened one night and heard the nightingale with its delicious "joog, joog, joog," pouring forth such sweet music that it seemed to make the moon stand still, charmed with the strain. I know that the nightingale did not sing *to me*. He did not know that I was listening, nor would he have cared if he had known. Perhaps if he had noticed that I had been so close he might have flown away; he was singing without regard to human ears. It is a sweet thing just to sing unto the Lord. Classical music is all very well, but heart music is the essence of sweetness. "My heart trusted in him, and I am helped, therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth, and with my song will I praise him." When you walk through a wood in spring-time you come upon a stretch of blue hyacinth. You fancy that a piece has been rent away from the azure mantle of the sky and thrown down among the trees. Why are those hyacinths clothed in such cerulean splendour? For what purpose is their sweet perfume poured forth in such lavish profusion? Dost thou say, "They waste their sweetness on the desert air"? Nay, O man! know rather that God is abroad: those flowers are his, and this is his garden: he delights to gaze on their living sapphires. Did you ever light upon a clump of lovely flowers right away in a lone spot of forest, moor, or common, where the foot of man has seldom profaned the soil? Have you not paused to admire? There they stand with their golden cups, like chamberlains of a king! Why are they here in such gorgeous livery? Who is all this beautiful variety of form and colour intended to greet?

"Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." What king has come to dine here and sip from those jewelled chalices? It is the eternal God who made them, and who takes delight in the work of his hands: it is he who walks among these solitary beauties in the cool of the day. Did you not see the flowerets bow their heads in worship as they felt his breath among their foliage?

Down deep at the bottom of the sea the coral grows in luxuriant abundance, and many-tinted shells that seem like unfinished rainbows are lying there unseen, never to be seized by human hands, and bartered in the market for gain. The Lord visits those cool grotts, and takes pleasure in his own delicate handiwork. All things are not for greedy man; the Lord hath his reserved gardens, his springs shut up, his fountains sealed. So let it be with us. Do not let us wait to praise the Lord till we can get an audience of our fellow-creatures, though we may sometimes wish that our songs would charm their ears and win their love for Jesus; but let us, oftentimes, retire into holy solitude, and then all alone break the silence of our loneliness, saying, "My heart greatly rejoiceth, and with my song will I praise the Lord. As long as I live and when I die, and when I rise again, and through eternity, with my song will I praise him."

"In blessing thee with grateful songs,
My happy life shall glide away;
'The praise that to thy name belongs,
Hourly with lifted hands I'd pay.

Abundant sweetness! While I sing
Thy love, my ravished heart o'erflows;
Secure in thee, my God and King,
Of glory that no period knows."

How I wish that some would begin at this moment a life of praise—begin by taking God to be their strength—begin by trusting in Christ to be their shield—begin by an experience of the power of prayer to bring them help. If you do so, you shall rise from height to height in your flights of praise: you shall first join with us below to sing as best you can, and afterwards you shall mount into the upper orchestra where all the chosen singers meet, and sit and chant with them the endless anthem which ascends unto Jehovah, our strength and our song.

God bless you, beloved, give you to know and prove the sweetness of this blessed text, and make you to sing David's divine song to the stringed instruments of your renewed hearts all the days of your lives. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalms xxvii., xxviii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—73 (Part II.),
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Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A GREAT BARGAIN.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it."—Matthew xiii. 45, 46.

A MERCHANTMAN endeavours to trade so as to make a profit. Whether he deals in pearls or in grain, he does not hope to obtain riches by labour. He leaves that to those who eat their bread in the sweat of their face. He tries to get his by the sweat of his brain. He is dependent not so much upon labour as upon knowledge, upon skill, upon the advantage which superior acquaintance with the article which he deals in gives to him. Now, this merchantman is, at the very commencement, in some measure a picture of the seeker after Christ. Christ and his salvation are not to be earned; they are not to be procured as the result of labour. But Christ is to be had by knowledge. What saith the Scripture? "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many;" that is, through their knowing Christ they become justified. This is, indeed, another way of putting the system of salvation which is stated thus: "How shall I hear without a preacher?" The work begins with hearing the preacher; then it goes on to believing what they hear, and through believing they are saved. This is virtually knowledge—the knowledge communicated by God's messenger or by God's word—the knowledge heard, the knowledge believed. So men come to the knowledge of him whom to know is life eternal, for when a man knows Christ and understands him, so that he gives his heart to him, then is he saved. Inasmuch, then, as the merchantman seeks his advantage by superior knowledge, he becomes a type of the man who gets saved through obtaining the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

I shall not, however, enlarge upon this analogy, but proceed at once to speak of the merchantman in this parable; for here we have a fit emblem of many who lay hold on Christ and find him to be their all in all. Let us watch this merchantman while he is doing four things;

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first, *seeking*; then, *finding*; then *selling out*; and, fourthly, *buying again*.

I. First, then, we shall WATCH HIM WHILE HE IS SEEKING. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls." It is different from the man we read of just now who, by accident, discovered a treasure while he was in the field. He was looking for something else, and came upon the treasure. That is the man whom God, in infinite sovereignty, saves, though he was heretofore indifferent and careless. This is a person of a nobler sort. He is of a higher grade of mind—of altogether different mental constitution. He is seeking goodly pearls—something good, not exactly seeking the one pearl of great price, for at first he does not know about it; but, still, he is seeking pearls, and he comes upon one pearl in consequence of his seeking.

Now, notice about him, as a seeker, that *he has his mind aroused and engaged*. He is thinking about something—thinking about pearls. His heart is occupied with his business. His energies are thrown into it. All his thoughts are in the direction of precious stones. Oh that we could wake men up to exercise the faculty of thinking, and then to direct, to regulate, and to control their thoughts! But thinking is an occupation that a great many persons altogether dislike. They are frivolous. We cannot get them to think about anything. Why is it that people are so passionately fond of reading novels, and so seldom read the true histories which are quite as interesting, and far more capable of affording pleasure and pastime? It is because the minds of men are frivolous. An idle tale—a silly story of a love-sick maid—will engross them by the hour together; but anything that is solid and worth the knowing seems to have small charm for their shallow brains. Many minds never get on the wing at all. Not a few men work so hard with their hands, and suffer such fatigue from bodily labour, that they are scarcely able to think much; while there are others who dissipate their time and consume their lives in idleness, till they are utterly disqualified for any vigorous thought. They are lazy and sluggish. They have the dry rot in their very souls. Their brains do not work. They seem to live in one everlasting lethargy and day-dream. Oh that men were wise, that they were thoughtful! Happy were the preacher who knew that he was addressing himself to a thoroughly intelligent, thoughtful congregation. We should expect, then, that the handfuls of good seed would drop into the furrows readily, and bring forth an abundant harvest. This merchantman's mind was aroused. He had something before him.

Equally evident is it that *he had a fixed definite object*. He had given himself to pearl-hunting, and pearl-hunting was to be the one object of his life. If you had met him, and said, "What are you seeking?" he would have answered in a moment, "I am seeking good pearls: have you any to sell me?" He would have been sure to have the answer ready to hand. But ask many a man whom you meet with, "Sir, what are you living for?" he would, perhaps, tell you what his trade or what his profession might be; but if you pressed him with the question, "What is the main object of life?" he would not like to say that he was living only to enjoy himself—seeking his own pleasure. He would

hardly like to say that he was living to grasp and grab and get a fortune. He would hardly know how to answer you. Many young men are in this condition : they have not a definite object. Now, you will not make a good captain if you do not know the port you are sailing for. You will make a poor life of it, young man, if you go out as an apprentice, and then afterwards out as a master, with no definite aim and end. Say to yourself, "I can only live for two things. I can live for God, or I can live for the devil ; which now am I going to do ?" Get your mind well fixed and firmly resolved as to which it shall be. I will put it to you as boldly and baldly as even Elijah did when he said, "If Baal be God, serve him ; and if Jehovah be God, serve him." If the world, if the flesh, if the devil be worth serving, go follow out the career of a sensualist and say so. Let yourself know what you are at : but if God be worth serving, and your soul worth the saving, go in for that ; but do not sneak through this world really seeking yourself, and yet not having the courage to say to yourself, "Self, you are living for yourself." Do have a definite and distinct object or else your vital energies will be wasted and your most industrious days will be recklessly squandered.

This merchantman, in the next place, had *an object which was not at all common-place*. Other people might go in for bricks and stones, or for grain, or for timber. He went in for pearls. He was a merchantman seeking pearls, and those the best he could pick up. He did not go in for common sea pearls, or pearls such as you may get in a Scotch river, but he went in for goodly pearls. He took a high aim, as far as that line of action was concerned. He went into a fine business. I would to God that many who have not found Christ nevertheless had sufficient of common-sense, sprinkled over with grace, to say, "I will go in for something good. My life shall not be a mean one"—

"Lives of great men all remind us
We may make our lives sublime."

It augurs well for a young man when he has such an aspiration as this within him, "My life, too, shall be sublime. I will not seek mean or menial objects, I will not cultivate any depraved or grovelling tastes. I will seek something that I can commend to my own conscience—something that will bear reflection when I come to die—something that will carry the sterling mark when I have to value it in another world." O young merchantman, if thou art about to start in business, I recommend thee this business of seeking goodly pearls. Seek truth, seek honour, seek temperance, seek peace, seek love, seek that which will make thee good and true and right. I will tell thee anon where thou mayest find these, but for the present it may suffice me to inculcate a laudable ambition for everything that is honest and of good repute, and an eager desire with thy heart for that which thy conscience commends.

He went thus, to seek pearls, and *he sought them with diligence*. The merchantman was seeking goodly pearls. He did not open a shop, and say, "Pearls bought here if anybody likes to bring them ;" but he went forth in quest of them. How far he travelled I do not know ; but the oriental trader frequently goes immense distances. You may meet at

Nijni-Novgorod, in the south of Russia, with traders who have been all round the globe seeking what they want—men who do not always travel by railway, but who will walk any distance to obtain the very article on which they have set their minds, and in which they deal. Distance seems with them to be no object. Ah, and when a man has got a noble object before him, and says, “Before I die, I will accomplish something that shall be right and true and beneficial to my fellow men,” he will face hardships that would baffle his fellows. I pray God that he may have the perseverance to carry that out, and that he may say, “Is there anything right to be learned: I will learn it, let it cost me what it may of care and toil, of headaches and heartaches, of buying experience and burning the midnight oil. If there is anything to be done that is good and true, I will do it at any hazard, for I am seeking goodly pearls.”

And as the man was seeking, so he was *using discrimination at the same time*. When we are very diligent and full of desire we are in imminent danger of being easily deceived; but this man seeking goodly pearls was not like a lady unacquainted with the nature of pearls, but he was a merchantman who knew a pearl when he saw it. He knew the character of pearls and the value of pearls; he could tell which were cloudy, and which had a soft radiance, and which were of the first water. Indeed, he could tell a genuine pearl from an imitation one. He was a merchantman seeking goodly pearls. Yes, dear friend, and I pray God tha’ if he put into the heart of any brother here to live for the right and for the true, he would give you great discrimination, for there are many shams in the world, and you may readily grasp that which appears to be substantial goodness, and it may turn out to be a shadow. Seek not pearls alone, but seek goodly pearls. Go in for the good; yea, cast your soul about to find the best.

Evidently this merchant *went into the business with comparatively moderate expectations*. He was seeking pearls. They must be of a tolerable size, and pure. He evidently expected to buy a good many of them. It was what he was seeking, seeking goodly “pearls” (in the plural). He had not reckoned that he should be fortunate enough to light upon one huge pearl that should be worth an emperor’s ransom. That he had not looked for, though he did feel a desire that way. If anybody had said, “Would you like to find a big pearl?” he would have said, “That I would, infinitely better than to find a number of little ones.” He hardly hoped for it, and therefore he did not seek it; but, still, he was ready enough to have it if it came in his way. And so, my dear friends, I am speaking of a class of persons—and I hope there may be representatives of them here—who want everything they can get that is good and true. You want to be temperate in all things; you want to have an unsullied character. I recollect that was my own desire, when first I thought of the life that lay beyond me. Before I knew the Lord I used to think, “O that I might be kept from dishonesty, that I might be preserved from falsehood, that I might be kept from a malicious spirit, that I might be right-hearted and true.” Those were the pearls that I wanted. I did not know just then that I could find something that would include all these minor pearls and a good deal more. Still, it is well when such a

desire as that is in the heart especially of any young man. I wish it were in the heart of the old, if up till now they have never found the pearl of great price.

Thus have I shown you the man while he is seeking. I wonder whether he has come in here to-night, and is sitting amongst this assembly. Perhaps it is not a man at all, but a woman, a merchant woman. They can do trading well. Lydia, that seller of purple, was, no doubt, an admirable tradeswoman, and in the divine trade of which we are now speaking there is no difference. Well, you do not know the Lord yet, dear friends, but you do want to seek everything that is excellent. So far so good.

II. Let us go a stage farther, then, and look at this man's FINDING. He was buying pearls everywhere. Where he went he asked people if they had any pearls. He went down back streets, into the slums of big cities, and found out the Jews in those old days, living in the dirtiest corners of the city. He wanted to know whether they had any pearls. It was pearls of a morning, pearls at mid-day, pearls at night. If under his window at night anybody had cried, "Pearls!" he would have been downstairs in a trice to get them. He was hard after pearls; and so it came to pass that he lit upon a pearl that he never hoped to see. It was more than he expected. Ah, I pray God that some here, whose hearts are honestly seeking after that which is right, may find Christ, who has in him more of the spirit of temperance, uprightness, truth, philanthropy than will be found anywhere else. Oh, that they might find him who is the truth, and whose doctrine is perfect holiness and everlasting life. It will be more than they ever expected to find; but when they do find it, how glad they will be.

Certainly this man was in the way of finding a fine pearl if anybody was. He was seeking *goodly pearls*, not *the one* pearl; but he was in the pearl line, and so he was likely to discover the best pearl if anybody discovered it. "Being in the way, the Lord met with him," says one of old. Oh, if thou hast desires after that which is right and true and good, I trust that the Lord Jesus will manifest himself to you, and that you will say, "This is the very thing I sought for; I have longed and pined after it, and here it is."

This find was to this merchantman *a remarkable one*. He did not find goodly pearls: he found what was much better, one pearl; and to him that one pearl contained all the little pearls that he had aforetime been seeking after. Tell it, and let all men know it, that all that is good beneath the moon—all that is true, all that is right, all that is loving, all that is philanthropic, all that is of good report, commendable before God and praiseworthy among men, is to be found in the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, and will be given to us, and wrought in us when we submit ourselves to him, and make him our all in all. He who is a Christian, if he be perfectly a Christian, has all good things in one. If there be aught that is to be praised and extolled by philosopher or sage, you shall find it in the example of the Master, and he will give us grace to exhibit it in ourselves.

So this man *found all in one*. What the value of that pearl was I do not know. The estimate of its value is not given. We only know that he thought it worth all that he had; and he went away and

sold all that he had that he might buy it. And he evidently thought it worth all the other pearls he had ever been seeking for, because if he spent his all upon that one pearl it would be clear that he must have abandoned henceforth the searching after smaller pearls, since he had no capital left. But he thought the one pearl of more account than all other pearls, and worth more than all that he had. Yes; I warrant you that he thought it worth a great deal more than all that he possessed. He would not have sold all that he had in stock to buy it if he had not the notion that it was worth ten times the price then, and that when he had paid it all he should have made his fortune, and should be rich beyond a miser's dream, for that is how traders in such things are sure to fetch their bargains. Well, when a man finds Christ I cannot tell you how much he values him, but this I know, that all the world besides seems nothing to a Christian when he has once found his Lord and Master. "Oh what a Christ have I!" saith he. But he cannot tell how dear—how inconceivably precious—the Christ of God is to his soul.

Concerning this find we must mark next that the man having found it, was *resolved that he would have it*. Having found the pearl of great price, he did not question whether he should buy it or not. If he had not gone out honestly to seek pearls he would have demurred at the price, but being intent upon pearl finding, he no sooner found this than he said, "I must have that. I can let the little pearls go if you like, but I must have that." And it is a grand thing when the Lord brings the human mind to this. "I see that in Christ there is everything I want—pardon for my sin, cleansing for my nature, grace to maintain my character and to make me perfectly fit for heaven. There is all in Christ that I want, and I must have him. I *must* have him. It comes to this—at any price—whatever it may cost me, I must and I will have him."

Now, although the parable does not say it in so many words, it is perfectly clear that the person with whom he was dealing was willing to sell. When he had found one pearl of great price he bought it, which he could not have done if the other had not been ready to sell it. Albeit the Lord in his mercy does not sell his grace, but gives it freely, the manner in which he disposes of it is here described under the figure of selling. If you want Christ, you may have him, if you are willing to come to the terms which God lays down. Of this I shall have to speak presently. If you desire this pearl of great price, there is no reason in the world why that pearl should not be yours to-night. If now you have found him, who is "the chiefest among ten thousand" and "altogether lovely," and you value him so that you cannot be happy without him, he will become at once your portion. If, having heard of Christ, your desire is toward him as all your soul can need, and you are ready to say, "I will not leave this house of prayer till Christ is mine," there is no obstacle to your possessing this priceless boon. Yea, God, even the Father, is willing that you should have his only begotten Son to be your pearl henceforth and for evermore.

III. Having thus described the seeker, and described the finder, we must go on to describe him **SELLING OUT**. He sold out all that he had. It had taken him a long time to get it together, and I

have no doubt he had much pleasure in the accumulation, but now he has great pleasure in selling. "Buy my farm," he says to one man. "Come buy it." "I don't know that I want to buy farms," says the other. "It is nought: it is nought." "Nevertheless, let us come to terms. I want money, and I must have money." And away went the furniture down in the house, one article after another. They must all go, clear them all out. There was a rapid sale. He must have money. They must go; everything must go for that pearl. Though he did not tell anybody his motive, that pearl was on his brain and on his heart, and all must go. He is more glad to get rid of his possessions than ever he was to obtain them. Away they shall go at the best price they will fetch, but go they must, for he must have the pearl. Well now, Jesus Christ is to be had, but there is a great deal that a man must give up if he is ever to call Christ his own.

"What, then," says one, "what am I to give up?" Well, there must be a selling off to-night of a whole mass of *old prejudices*. Sometimes when the truth as it is in Jesus comes to a man's mind he repels it, because it is so different from what he has learnt ever since he was a child; and the notion is that you had better follow the religion of your parents. If you had been a Hottentot, you would have worshipped a fetish. If you had been born in Hindustan, you must have worshipped Juggernaut, according to that theory. But it is a great mercy when a man says, "Now, I understand that Jesus the Son of God has died in the room and place and stead of sinners that believe in him, and I am simply to believe in him and I shall be saved. On my believing I shall receive a new nature and be born again by the Holy Spirit, and henceforth I shall become the disciple and the servant of Christ. Now," says the man, "I will do it. It is contrary to what I have always been told. I have been led to think that it was my good works which would save me. I have heard that the grace was in the sacraments, but at length I perceive that God teaches in his word that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ, and I will have it. I will sell my prejudices off. Away they shall go."

Next to that you must sell off *your righteousness*. It will not fetch much, but I daresay you think it is a fine thing. Hitherto you have been very good, and your own esteem of yourself is that as touching the commandments—"all these have I kept from my youth up." And what with a good deal of church going, or attendance at the meeting house, and a few extra prayers on a Christmas-day and on Good Friday, and just a little dose of sacraments, you feel yourself in tolerably good case. Now, friend, that old moth-eaten righteousness of yours that you are so proud of you must sell off and get rid of it, for no man can be saved by the righteousness of Christ while he puts any trust in his own. Sell it all off, every rag of it. And suppose nobody will buy it, at any rate you must part with it. Assuredly it is not worth putting amongst the filthiest of rags, for it is worse than they are.

And everything else that you have heretofore thought fit to boast of—come, you must get rid of it. You know so much. Well, you had better sell off what you know, for except a man become as a little child he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. You are somebody, you fancy

you are not cast in a common mould, for you have a great strength of will, and can force your own way to heaven. You will have to get rid of that little conceit, for that strength of yours will be your weakness. It is only when we are weak in ourselves that we can ever be strong in Christ. Are you contented so to do? Will you sell off all the old prejudices and all the old righteousnesses? Going, gone! Will you let them go, or have you got a reserve price? Let them go, for they are dross and dung, and the sooner they are gone the better, for then you can buy the pearl, but not till then.

Ay, and there are some men that will have to give up a good deal of what they call pleasure, *sinful pleasure*. No pleasure which is honest, which is really beneficial to us, need ever be denied to us.

“Religion never was designed
To make our pleasures less.”

It makes them vastly more. But any pleasure that savours of sin is to be done away with. Come, can you sell all that off? That mixing in loose company, anything approaching to lewdness, anything that has to do with the gratification of the vile passions of the flesh—come, for Christ’s sake, can you give it up? Well, if you cannot, of course you cannot have the pearl. If you must have the world you cannot have Christ; if you can find pleasure in the haunts of sin, you are of your father the devil, and his works you do. But come out from it; give it all up; cast it behind you. These things must be sold off if we are to have the pearl.

And, then, sometimes, in some cases, men have to give up a good deal of the honours and the satisfaction of life that arise from the esteem of their fellow-creatures. Has it come to this, “If I become a Christian they will ridicule me.” Well now, can you not put up with a little obloquy for Christ? “But if I am an earnest Christian then I shall have to encounter all sorts of slander.” Be it so, and can you not give up the applause of men for the sake of Christ? Come and let the dogs tear your character to shreds so long as you are right before him, and your motive is pure. “Ay, but I know what it is. I shall get the cold shoulder in society if I become a thoroughly earnest Christian. There is Lady So-and-so, for whom I have very great respect, whose good opinion I would not forfeit on any account, and she will not recognise me any more.” Very well, can you put the whole lot of it into the scale and say, “I sell it all off; let it all go, that I may have the pearl.” That man is not worthy of Christ who would be ashamed to stand in the pillory with him, or go with him to prison and to death. We must so love him that we count reproach for his sake to be honour, even as Moses counted the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt.

“Well, you have taken enough surely.” Yes, but this pearl hunter sold all that he had, and you have got a little left. You have got some prospects. If you become a Christian your old uncle will cut you out of his will. You know very well that if you shall go to hear the gospel at such and such a place you are very likely to be turned out of your situation. “But we *must* live,” says somebody. This is not at all clear to my mind. I do know that we must die, but as to “must living” I do not feel quite so certain about it. Infinitely better to die than ever

to do a dishonourable thing. If Jesus Christ be our Master, we must be content to let the fairest prospect go, and all things that seem to tell for our success in this life must be secondary in our account. We must seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Ay, and sometimes love that has been longed for must go for Christ's sake. Company that has been delightful must be forsaken for Christ's sake, and if all this be done, yet still it is not enough. He that has Christ must give to Christ himself and all that he has. I should doubt whether I were a follower of Christ if I had not in my very soul given up to him all that I am and all that I have, to be for ever his. He has bought us with a price, and it is not surely meet for us to give him one arm, and one eye, and one foot, and half a heart. He that is a true Christian is a Christian through and through. Whatever he possesses of talent, whatever of substance he owns, he looks upon nothing as being his own, but as all belonging to his Master, and he is prepared to use all for his Master's glory, and to part with all if so it were needful for the maintenance of his Master's kingdom. The merchantman sold all that he had.

I think I see you draw back. "This—this is too hard a line." Very well, if you do not want to buy the pearl, you see—that is to say, if you do not want to make your fortune—for that buying of the pearl was the making of the man's fortune—if you do not think the pearl is worth it, pray do not have it. It is not possible to estimate the intrinsic value, the real worth of Christ. We do not cast pearls before swine. If you do not want him there are plenty who do. He need not come begging of you that you will be his customer. God forbid you should refuse, but if you do not want him, then say so. Only do say it, and definitely and distinctly say it, "I will have nothing to do with him."

But this man went and sold all that he had. I tell you he was glad to sell it. He counted that the man who bought his farm was doing him a favour. "Take it," he said, "there, I will let you have it under price if you will only let me have the money. I so much want to get money." No, but he did not dare tell him so much for fear he should go and raise the price, but in his heart, "I do so much want to get that pearl that I really would be obliged to anybody who will take of me that stock off hand." So if you really want Christ, instead of needing him to urge you to dispose of these poor effects which I have described, you will be eager to be rid of them that Christ may be yours. May the Spirit of God work in you such a high resolve.

IV. Now, the last thing is THE BUYING. He had sold all that he had, and then he pays the shekels over—pays them over that he may have the pearl, and he gets the pearl. It was a considerate purchase—a deliberate bargain. He did not see the pearl and then in a hurry go and sell his goods and guess at the value of it. No, but he had looked at it, for he was a seeker of pearls. He knew a pearl when he saw it, though I dare say he did not tell the seller all that he had seen in it. He said to himself, "That is a wonderful pearl. If I can get the money—my little stock wont fetch above five hundred pounds—but if I can get it for that, I am a made man." And so he thought it over. It did not want much thinking over. Oh, if a soul did but know Christ, he would not think twice before

he would have him. If men were not such fools—if they had but light from heaven to see the value of my Lord and Master, instead of our standing here and having to beg and persuade and find out new words of commendation, methinks they would only say, "Tell us about him. We will have him. What does he ask of us? What can we do for him? What can we submit to so long as we may but make sure of him who forgives all sin, who gives immediate and perfect salvation to all who trust him? So long as we may have the Christ of whom it is written, 'He that believeth in him hath everlasting life,' we shall be content." It was a well considered purchase.

And it was an *immediate purchase*. He did not go home and say, "I shall think about this." No, but he knew that pearl and he said, "If I let that slip through my fingers I shall never see the like of it again. If anybody else gets that bargain, then I shall have lost the one opportunity of my life." And so he does but take time enough to go and sell his farm off, and the little land he had, and the little property he had. He was back quickly with his money, only afraid somebody might have slipped in between and offered another thousand or two more than he was able to raise, and that thus he might lose the pearl. So, dear friends, he that cometh to Christ aright may well deliberate about it, but the end of his deliberation ought to be very speedy. "If he is to be had, let me have him. Oh, if I can know my sins forgiven, let me know it. Oh, if by any means I can have peace with God—if I can become a child of God and an heir of heaven—if my eternal happiness can be secured, oh, let it be secured! How is it done? Come, tell me at once. I wish not to leave my seat till I have found that which you speak of." It was a deliberate bargain—an immediate bargain.

And then it was a *joyful one*. I am sure his eyes twinkled as he paid over his money. I should like to have a picture of his face, when at last he had got his pearl. Now, that which he had been all over the world for he had got, only something a great deal better. He had got his pearl, and I dare say he was ready to jump for joy to think that he had got ready with his money. Ah, when a soul gets Christ it is—

"Happy day, happy day,
For he has washed my sins away."

It is the beginning of delight to a soul when he can say, "Jesus is mine; I know he is. Grace has enabled me to lay hold upon him."

And, oh, what an *enriching purchase* it was which the man had made. When he had once got the pearl instead of his property he thought to himself, "Why, I have got a hundred times more property now than I had. Though I have given up that bit of land I can buy half a province now, if I like, with this pearl which I have obtained. So, brothers and sisters, if you have ever given up anything for Christ I am sure that the Lord Jesus Christ has made you very ample amends. Some years ago a person rather eccentrically advertised for persons who had been losers by obedience to the divine command—that if any one who had lost anything through love to Christ would apply to him he would make it up. The odd advertisement appeared for some months in one of our religious periodicals. But the oddest thing is that nobody ever answered it. I should have thought that somebody

would have tried and made out a case ; but nobody did. They cannot make out such a case : they are no losers by Christ. "But," say some, "the martyrs were, were they not?" Well, they are up there, ask them. They will tell you as you look at them with their ruby crowns, all brilliant in the light of God, as they stand—

"Fairest of the sons light,
Midst the bright ones, doubly bright,"

that they counted it their honour that they should be permitted to lay down their lives for Jesus' sake. Oh, there is no losing when you deal with him. You will make five hundred per cent. over this exchange ; be sure of that. No, it shall be a thousand per cent., for "No man," says he, "shall lose house and lands for my sake that shall not receive in this world a hundredfold, and in the world to come, life everlasting."

This was a *final purchase*. The merchantman, according to the parable, never went buying pearls anymore. "No," said he, "no : I have bought a pearl of great price, and now I will go out of the business." And when a man once finds Christ—ah, then he seeks nothing more. If Jesus Christ be mine, more than all in him I find. He does not want a secondary object. His desires all stay at home, and satisfy themselves with the fulness that is in Christ Jesus. He went out of the pearl hunting line, for he had found all the pearls he should ever want. And it was a *purchase he never regretted*. The parable does not say that he came back to the seller and said, "There, take your pearl, and let me have my house and lands again." No, it was done. The great transaction was done. He never wished to have it undone. With his pearl of immense worth he was a rich man, worthy to be the rival of princes, and he felt that it was enough. Oh, blessed are they who can say "It is enough," and can rejoice and bless and magnify the Lord.

"Now rest, my long-divided heart ;
Fix'd on this blissful centre, rest :
With ashes who would grudge to part,
When call'd on angels' bread to feast?"

Let me, however, just put in one word of caveat. Take care, dear merchant brothers, that when you buy a pearl you buy a good one—that it is the pearl of great price, because I have known noble spirits whom I have admired and felt ready to weep over ; men that have been heroic in the pursuit of that which seemed to them perfectly true, and have made a sacrifice of all that they have for it, and yet they have been deceived. They have grasped antichrist instead of Christ, and welcomed the lie of hell which came to them in the garb of the angel of light. Mind, mind that you get Christ and his truth as you find it revealed in Scripture, and revealed a second time in your own heart by the Holy Ghost, for whatever is short of Christ will prove a cheat and deceive you. Some years ago one of the largest pearls that was ever found passed into the hands of a Russian. It was a very large pearl indeed—as large as an egg, and of a pear shape. He purchased it, the party who had it being ignorant of its value. He was a man of substance, and he kept it, and prepared a house which, though mean on the exterior, was sumptuously furnished within ; and he would take his guests into an inner chamber which when it was

unlocked contained a table of marble in the centre of which was a box which had to be unlocked with divers keys and the reading of an alphabet, and so forth, and at last he produced this pearl, and he was very chary of ever permitting it to depart from his hand, for it was of immense value. The Emperor of Russia bid an enormous price for it, and promised him honour and rank besides, but he would not part with it. It happened, however, that the possessor of this pearl was implicated—whether truthfully or not I cannot tell—in a conspiracy, and had to leave his home at St. Petersburg. He took with him nothing but his pearl, and came to Paris sufficiently rich in the possession of that pearl. On a certain day the Duke of Brunswick, who was his only rival in such matters, came with some others to see the pearl. The owner unlocked it with great care and much deliberation, and when he had opened it he was observed to turn suddenly pale. It seemed as if he had been stricken with death. Unhappy man! His pearl had suddenly become clouded, as pearls sometimes do. It had been taken with some disease which happens to pearls, if I may so express it. In a short time it would turn to powder; it had ceased to be of any value whatever, and he had come down from a millionaire to a pauper. Yet he had bought a good pearl notwithstanding. There is only one pearl that never can be clouded, and will last right on throughout eternity, and that is the Son of God, “who only hath immortality.” If you get him, you have a hope divine which never can fail you; but if you get a hope in priests or a hope connected with sacramentarianism, or any other hope but that of which Christ is top and bottom, beginning and end, you may make what sacrifice you will, but your brightest prospects will end in bitterest disappointment. The Lord grant that none of us may ever be thus balked of our life-confidence; that no such blank bewilderment may ever fall on our spirits.

“Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that *seek* the Lord.” The voice of Jesus is heard in this parable of the kingdom describing and directing the *seekers*. Such persons comprise no small fraction of an assembly like the present. It would indeed be strange if seekers were not always largely represented here, and that in every stage of anxious enquiry. I am sure some of you have seen the pearl you want sparkling before your eyes. I wonder how many of you have resolved to sell all you have to buy it. But who among you all have actually made the pearl your own, and rejoice in its possession? That such of you will go on your way rejoicing there is no doubt; but will you not return and give glory to God? Shall we not have the happiness of greeting you here in the fellowship of the kingdom of his grace? The Lord grant it may be so for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew xiii.
24 to end.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—484, 657; and 109,
Charlesworth’s collection (“Art thou weary”).

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

CONCERN FOR OTHER MEN'S SOULS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in mine heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsman according to the flesh: who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."—Romans ix. 1—5.

WHAT an intense man Paul was. Once convince him, and his whole nature moved in the direction which he judged to be right. He was whole-hearted when he persecuted the church of God, and he was equally whole-hearted when afterwards he laboured with all his might to build up the church which he had sought to destroy. I would to God we were all as thorough-going in the service of our Lord. The pity is that so many professing Christians appear to have no heart, while others borrow a heart for occasions, but do not seem to keep one permanently beating in their own bosoms. O for a warm, engine-like heart, all consecrated, and for ever pulsing mightily.

What a change was wrought in Saul of Tarsus, that he who was so ardent a persecutor should become so fervent a preacher! His conversion is one of the proofs of the divinity of Christianity. The study of the story of Paul was the means of the conversion of Lord Lyttleton, who read it with the design of exposing it as an imposture. His friend Gilbert West was at the same time considering the resurrection of our Lord in a similar spirit, and happily with the same result: the friends met to unite in the joint conviction that the Bible is the word of God. Dr. Johnson says of Lyttleton's "Observations upon the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul," "it is a treatise to which infidelity has never been able to fabricate a specious answer." Consider for a moment the renowned conversion of Paul. It was singularly opportune that just at that period when the church wanted such a man, the apostle with his remarkable education, his noble purpose, and his acquaintance with Jewish and Greek literature, should

have been called out from the world and placed in the very forefront of the battle for Christ. Truly might he say that he was not a whit behind the very chief of the apostles, though in his humility he felt himself to be nothing. No name in the Christian church can be pronounced with greater honour after that of our glorious Master than the name of Paul, who was indeed a wise master-builder. When you remember what he was by nature you will marvel at the extraordinary change of thought and feeling which was wrought in him! He who was cruel to the saints, who gave his voice against Stephen and held the garments of those that stoned him, became tenderhearted as a nurse towards her child. Though his Jewish brethren terribly persecuted him, and pursued him from city to city, there is not a trace of resentment in any word he writes, but he is full of gentleness. The lion had become a lamb, and he that breathed out threatenings breathed out prayers! He who seemed to burn with enmity became a flame of love. Dear friends, before we go any further, pause and answer this question,—Has such a change as this been wrought in you? Perhaps you have never been conspicuously a blasphemer or a persecutor as Paul was, but still if converted there will have been a very wonderful change in you. Old things will have passed away and all things will have become new. Do you feel that, and do you recognize the change both in your inner and outer life? If not, ye must be born again. Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Our first thought after reading this passage is, what a wonderfully tender and loving preacher Paul must have been. One of the early fathers was wont to say that he wished he could have seen Solomon's temple in its glory, Rome in its prosperity, and Paul preaching. I think the last the grandest sight of the three. Oh, to have heard him speak! It might have shamed us into deeper tones of earnestness. Though, I suppose, his oratory was not very astonishing as mere rhetoric, for some said his speech was contemptible, yet it must have been wonderfully powerful upon the heart, for it abounded in sighs and tears and other tokens of evident emotion; besides, his awful intensity of look and tone must have made his discourses irresistible. He would never have written as he has done in his epistles if he had been one who could speak with icicles hanging about his lips. He must have spoken from a burning heart, which shot forth red-hot bolts of fiery words. He poured his language out like lava from a volcano, from the flaming furnace of his soul; hence his sentences burned their way into the hearts of those who heard him. Brother, if you are called to preach the gospel, let Paul be your model. I reckon that we never preach aright unless we pour out our inmost soul, and unless we long and hunger and thirst for the conversion of our hearers, we might as well be in bed and asleep. We shall teach them to be indifferent if we ourselves are indifferent. If it will satisfy us to read through a little essay or to speak a few godly words without heart and life, we are not called to the ministry: we are not sent, for we feel no woe upon us; we have not the anointing, for the live coal from off the altar has never blistered our lips. John Bunyan says that he often felt while preaching that he could give his own salvation for the salvation of his hearers; and I pity

the man who has not felt the same. To preach with the harps of angels ringing in your ears, anxious that all your hearers should stand at last amongst the elect company above, or to preach with the groans of hell rising into your ears and piercing your heart, anxious beyond all things that no man who listens to your voice should ever come into that place of torment,—this is the Pauline style. The style of Demosthenes, the manner of Cicero, the method of the forum—these are nothing. Commend me to the eloquence of Paul, and to the oratory of his Master; for Paul was a great preacher because he caught his Master's spirit and spoke in the manner of him of whom they said of old "Never man spake like this man."

Now coming to the text and dwelling upon it, I shall want to notice first, *the persons about whom Paul felt the anxiety which he expresses*; then, secondly, *we shall look further into the character of that anxiety*; and, lastly, we shall dwell awhile upon *the excellence of each one of us feeling just as Paul did*, for a thousand good results would follow if God the Spirit would bring us to the same condition of heart.

I. First, then, WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE FOR WHOM PAUL WAS ANXIOUS BEYOND MEASURE AND OUT OF BOUNDS?

To begin with. They were *his worst enemies*. The name of Paul brought the blood into the face of a Jew. He spat in rage. More than forty of them had bound themselves with an oath that they would slay him, and the whole company of the circumcised seemed, wherever he went, to be moved by the same impulse. He frequently gathered large congregations of Gentiles who attended to him earnestly, but the Jews stirred up riots and mobs, and, frequently, he was in danger of his life from them. They detested him; regarding him as an accursed apostate from the faith of his fathers. Remembering how earnest he had been against Christ, they could not believe in his sincerity when he became a Christian, or, if they did, they hated him as a fanatic whose delusion was beyond measure mischievous. His generous retaliation was to pray for them, nay, more, to carry the whole nation on his heart as a burden. "I have continual heaviness," says he, "and sorrow of heart for my kinsmen according to the flesh."

Now, if any of you in following Christ should meet with opposition, avenge it in the same way. Love most the man who treats you worst. If any man would kill you in his anger, kill him with your loving prayers. If he smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also in submission, and lift both hands and eyes to heaven and cry, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." Never let oppressors see your anger rise. They will observe your emotion and your grief, and they will perceive that you are naturally vexed and troubled, but let them also see that you bear them no malice, but desire their welfare. I commend this to those who have a hard fight for Christ in the work-room, in the midst of sneers and jests. Never use the devil's weapons, though they lie very handy, and look very suitable. Only use Christ's omnipotent weapon of love, so shall ye be his disciples.

Next, these people for whom Paul was in so much concern were *his kinsfolk according to the flesh*. It is well said that charity must begin at home, for he that does not care for his own household is worse than a heathen man and a publican. He who does not desire the salvation of

those who are his own kith and kin, "how dwelleth the love of God in him?" Christianity is expansive, it makes the bosom glow with love to all that God has made; but, at the same time, our love does not expand so as to lose force; and this is seen when it turns its power towards those who are nearest home. Is thy husband unsaved? O woman, love him to Christ! Is thy child unconverted? O parent, pray that child to Christ! Are your neighbours still out of Christ? Lay them on your heart as an intercessor before God on their account, and cease not to plead till they are saved. Think much of the heathen: by all means regard India and China, and the like, but do not forget Newington Butts, and Lambeth and Southwark, or wherever else it is your lot to live. Next to your homes let your own neighbourhoods be first of all considered, and then your country, for all Englishmen are akin. Wherever we wander we are proud of our common country, and, like the Romans of old, we are somewhat quick to make known our citizenship; therefore, let us never cease to plead for this beloved island and our kinsmen according to the flesh. For his countrymen Paul prayed, and never let us bear within our bones a soul so dead as to forget our native land.

We may regard those for whom he prayed in the next light as *persons of great privileges*: a very important point. They had privileges by birth,—“Who are Israelites.” Many of you are highly favoured: you are not Israelites, but you are the children of godly parents, which is much the same thing. Almost the first sound you ever heard from your mother’s lip was the voice of prayer for you. You can recollect when you were taken for the first time to the house of prayer, when, perhaps, you did not understand anything, but still your godly friends thought it well that you should sit in your earliest days in the courts of the Lord’s house? In that sense you are like the Jews. You have the privilege of being born in the midst of holy and gracious influences: an advantage not to be despised. Those poor gutter children, born we scarcely know where, who pine in poverty and breathe an atmosphere of vice; whose young ears are from the first so much acquainted with the voice of blasphemy, that they will never tingle should the profanity of hell be let loose around them—those, I say, start in the race of life under terrible disadvantages. And you, some of you, have had everything in your favour; for you the path of right is smooth, and there are many beckoning you to walk in it, and yet we tremble for you, lest you, with other children of the kingdom, should be cast out, while many come from the east and from the west and sit down at the banquet of grace. If there are any people we ought to pray for above others, it seems to me they are the unconverted who live in the light but will not see; who have the bread of heaven upon the table before them but will not eat; who have free grace and dying love sounding in their ears, but yet refuse the wondrous message of grace. Beloved, let us not rest unless we feel a deep solicitude for those who stand on a par with Israelites, since they have the privilege of being born under a Christian roof.

The objects of Paul’s prayer had yet a higher privilege, for it is said, “to whom pertaineth the adoption.” There was an outward adoption. “Israel is my first-born,” saith God. Israel enjoyed national advantages;

and we also, living in such a land as this, possess innumerable gospel privileges. England is, as it were, the favourite of heaven. God has been pleased to adopt the nation as his child, giving it special liberty, an open Bible, the free proclamation of the gospel, and the church of God in the midst of it to be its light. To Israel belonged the glory, too; that is to say, God had revealed himself in their midst from the mercy seat in the bright light of the shekinah. And, oh, in this very house of prayer, I am sure I may say it, the Lord has manifested his glory very wonderfully. How many hundreds have been turned from darkness to light in this place! At times the power of God has been gloriously revealed. It was so last Sunday evening. We felt it, we distinctly recognized it, and we are looking for many to come forward to declare what God did for souls on that occasion. Well, then, if you have seen this glory, if you have heard the glorious gospel, if you have felt in some degree the working of the gracious Spirit and have had some longings, some wishes, towards salvation, what a sad thing will it be if after all you should be cast away! I do fear me that this will be true of many of you, and I have great heaviness in my heart at the thought.

And then they had *the first hold of all the spiritual gifts which the Lord bestowed upon the sons of men*. They had as it were a monopoly of light and truth among them. The Jewish people had been singularly favoured: they had seen God revealing his Son to them by types, by priests, by sacrifices, by the temple, by a thousand signs and marks. Verily the kingdom of God had come very near to them. But the privileges of the Jews were not greater than the privileges of men and women who hear the gospel in these days, for Christ is not so well seen in bleeding bullocks and rams and hyssop and scarlet wool as he is seen in the preaching of the gospel. In the gospel God has rent the veil, and made bare his heart to us in the person of his dying Son. You have no longer to spell out the mind of God by mysterious hieroglyphs; it is written in plain letters, and the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein. You have but to hear it, and with the exercise of an ordinary understanding the letter of its meaning may be comprehended, and if there be a willing heart, no matter how small the capacity of the mind, there is intellect enough to receive the saving truth. Ye do not now live in the moonlight of the Jewish dispensation, but ye bask in the noontide sunlight of truth. God who spake to our fathers by the prophets hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son who is the express image of his person and the brightness of his glory. "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh." Because we fear you may do so our heart is heavy, and we have sorrow of heart for some of you. We are distressed for you whose feeling comes and goes like the midnight meteor. Your case is one of such peril that we are deeply concerned about you. O God, help all thy servants to feel what a dreadful thing it will be for persons so highly privileged to be lost for ever.

I should not have completed the subject if I did not say that Paul had a great solicitude for these people because *he saw them living in the commission of great sin*. Some of them were exceedingly moral, and the bulk of them extremely religious, and yet they were living in gross sin. Do you know what is the greatest of sins? It is to be at enmity

with God. The most damning of iniquities is to refuse Christ. Did God send out of his bosom his only-begotten Son to die for men, and do men reject him? Ah, this is worse than rejecting the law, worse than rejecting the gospel, for it is a direct personal insult to the loving God—this rejecting the Son of God, his only Son, his bleeding, dying Son. Here sin reaches its climax and surpasses itself in infamy.

These men rejected Christ and set up their phylacteries, their paying of tithes of annise and mint and cummin, their fasting thrice in the week, and I know not what trifles besides, in insulting competition with the Saviour. In the same manner at this hour many persons value their external religiousness above faith in Jesus. They attend to the ceremonies of this church or of the other, and refuse the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. The greatest of sins lies there. Ye may as easily be lost religiously as irreligiously unless your religion is God's religion and is based upon faith in his dear Son. This grieved the apostle, that they were mad against him whom they ought to have loved, and were violent against him in whom they should have believed, so that they had become a race anathematized from Christ. I know he means that, because he says he could wish that he himself could stand in their place, and take that anathema upon himself which he felt was upon them. They had said "His blood be on us and on our children," and Paul knew that it would be. He remembered the Master's words when he said "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings and ye would not. Behold your house is left unto you desolate." He could see in spirit the siege of Jerusalem, the most tremendous of all slaughters, the most fearful of all scenes of blood enacted on the face of the earth; and his heart sank within him, and his spirit quailed at the thought of the tremendous judgment. Some in these days describe the penalty of sin as though it were a trifle. I beseech you do not regard them. If I had one lying dying before me whom I loved, if I was in any fear about the salvation of that dying person, I would not say "Perhaps when you go out of this world you may be unsaved, but there is a larger hope; and I would not have you distress yourself about immediate repentance, for mercy may come to you in another state." Sirs, I dare no more talk thus than administer a draught of poison to one I love. No, rather would I say, "My brother, my sister, it is now or never with you. Seek the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: for when once the Master of the house hath risen up and shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without and to knock, and to say 'Lord, Lord, open unto us,' he will not say 'Wait a while: I will open by-and-by,' but his final reply will be, 'Verily I say unto you, I know you not.'" There is no hope of blessing for those who die impenitent anyhow or anywhen, but they must depart, depart, depart, and that for ever. O my hearer, I beseech you do not run the risk of the everlasting wrath of God. May God help you by his infinite mercy to feel how terrible a thing it is to be out of Christ, for our God is a consuming fire, and it is written, "Beware ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." Now the thought of all this made the apostle feel great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart for his brethren, his kinsfolk according to

the flesh. If he had thought that they would be annihilated, when they died he would have had no heaviness about them. If men and women are nothing after all but cats and dogs, and have no immortal souls, I for one will never bother my head about them. If they can die, let them die: it is nothing to me that they should be immortal. It is because I know that they *are* immortal and if they die unsaved they will have for ever to endure the wrath of God, that my soul feels, and desires to feel more than ever, a continual heaviness of heart concerning every unsaved soul that still lives. God grant us more of this heaviness of spirit. May we be deeply pained by that dread, awful, overwhelming, I will even dare to add, horrifying thought of souls being lost for ever.

II. I have spoken enough, then, as to the persons for whom Paul was anxious. Now let us notice, secondly, HIS DESCRIPTION OF THIS ANXIETY, which was *very truthful*. There was no sham about it. It is pretty easy to work yourself up into a state of feeling; but it was not passing emotion with Paul, it was deep, true, constant grief. He says, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost." He did not fancy that he felt, but he really felt heart-breakings for guilty souls. He did not sometimes get up into that condition or down into it, but he lived in it. "I lie not," he says, "I do not speak more than the truth. I do not exaggerate." For fear he should not be believed he asseverates as strongly as is allowed to a Christian man, "I say the truth in Christ. I lie not." His was true heaviness, real sorrow. Do we feel the same, or is it only a little excitement at a revival meeting, a chance feeling which passes over us through sympathy with other people who are earnest? May the Lord plough your soul deep, dear friend. If he means you to be a soul winner, he will. May the ploughers make deep furrows upon your heart, as once they did upon your Master's back. You are not fit to carry souls on your heart till it has been bruised with grief for them. You must feel deeply for the souls of men if you are to bless them.

Paul's feeling was *very gracious*. It was not an animal feeling, or a natural feeling; it was a gracious feeling, for he says, "I say the truth in Christ." When he was nearest to his Lord, when he felt most his union with Christ, and communion with him, then he felt that he did mourn over men's souls. It was truth in Christ that he was expressing, because he was one with Christ. He had a love for sinners because his very soul was knit to Christ. He had a heaviness such as his Master knew when he also was very heavy, and sweat great drops of blood in Gethsemane, in the day of his passion. O beloved, we want the Spirit of God to work this feeling in us. It is of no use to try to get it by reading books, or to pump yourself up to it in private; this feeling is the work of God. A soul-winner is a creation. As a Christian has to be created, so out of a Christian the soul-winner has to be fashioned. There has to be a careful preparation, a softening of the soul to make the worker know how naturally to care for the welfare of others. Paul had been trained and qualified for soul-saving work.

He says that his conscience bore him witness that he spake the truth, and then he says the Holy Spirit bore witness with his conscience. May we have such a manifest love for sinners that we can ask the Holy Ghost to bear witness that we have it. Brothers, sisters, I am

sometimes afraid that our zeal for conversion would not stand the test of the Holy Ghost. Perhaps we want to increase our denomination, or enlarge our church for our own honour; or we want to get credit for doing good, or to feel that we have power and influence over others. None of these motives can be tolerated: our concern for souls must be wrought in us by the Holy Ghost. It must come irresistibly upon us, and become a master passion. Just as the birds, when the eggs are in the nest, have upon them what the Greeks call a *σροπνη*, a natural feeling, that they must sit on those eggs, and that they must feed those little fledglings which will come from the eggs; so if God calls you to win souls, you will have a natural love for them, a longing wrought in you by the Holy Spirit, so that the whole of your being will run out in that direction, seeking the salvation of men.

Then the apostle goes on to say that he had *great heaviness*, not only heaviness, but *great* heaviness. Was he, therefore, an unhappy man? By no means: he had great joy in other things, though he had great heaviness on this point. We are not to imagine that Paul went about publicly groaning and sighing because Israel was not saved. Oh, no. He rejoiced in the Lord and bade others rejoice. But still there was the skeleton in the closet; a silent heartbreaking grief was on him. We are many men in one, and each man is a very complicated piece of mental machinery. We can be in great heaviness and in great exultation at the same time. Whenever Paul's thoughts turned towards his brethren, a great heaviness came upon him. It bore him down, and he would have sunk under it if it had not been for sustaining grace. "O God," he said, "shall my nation perish? Shall my people die? Shall my kinsmen be anathema? Shall it come to this, that they shall hear the gospel in vain and perish after all?"

He had great heaviness, and he tells us that this did not come on him at times, but that he always felt it whenever his thoughts turned that way: I have "*continual sorrow* in my heart." In his very heart, for it was not a superficial desire; a continual sorrow, for it was no fitful emotion. It always grieved him to think that his kinsmen should reject Christ. He thought of Jerusalem and of its doom; he thought of his brethren and their unbelief, and then he thought of how they had been the enemies of Christ, and therefore sorrow filled his heart. I could wish that in full many a professor the selfsame sorrow reigned, for then there would be much more holy work done for souls.

The strongest expression which Paul uses is that which is contained in the third verse, "For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." The margin reads, "separated from Christ." Now this text has so puzzled the expositors that they have done their very best to kill it and tear out its bowels, to get rid of its obvious meaning. They have invented all kinds of interpretations, such as that he did once wish himself separated from Christ. Now, do you think the apostle Paul would have begun by saying, "I say the truth in Christ. I lie not," and so on, if after all that mountain of expression he was going to bring out this little insignificant sense, that once upon a time he also wished to be separated from Christ? Besides, the Greek does not bear such a preposterous rendering. Our version has given as fully as it could the meaning of

the apostle. The gentlemen who like to dissect texts and pull them to pieces say, "Well, but he could not have wished to be an enemy to Christ, an enemy to God, and to be lost, and yet he could not be lost without being an enemy to Jesus." My dear friends, if you take passionate expressions to pieces with icy hands, you will never understand anything which comes from the heart. Of course the apostle never thought of wishing that he could be an enemy to Christ, but he did sometimes look at the misery which comes upon those who are separated from Christ, until he felt that if he could save his kinsmen by his own destruction, ay, by himself enduring their heavy punishment, he could wish to stand in their stead. He did not say that he ever did wish it, but he felt as if he *could* wish it when his heart was warm. His case was parallel with that of Moses when he prayed the Lord to spare the people and said, "If not, blot my name out of the Book of Life." Do you think he wished it done? No, it was because that blotting out would have been to him the most horrible thing supposable that therefore he went even to that length for the good of his people. Because the last of all things the apostle could have thought of was being separated from Christ, therefore he says there were times when he could even have borne that most horrible, unthinkable thing, if he could but have saved the people. Is there a minister of Christ who has not sometimes used expressions which cool logic could never justify? Why, sirs, love knows nothing of grammar even in its common talk. A true passion grinds words to dust. When the heart is full of love even the boldest hyperboles are simple truths. Extravagances are the natural expression of warm hearts even in ordinary things, and when a man's whole soul gets seething like a caldron and boiling like a pot with sympathy and pity for men that are being lost, he speaks what in cold blood he never would have said. What the cool doctrinalist pulls to pieces, and the critic of words regards as being altogether absurd, true zeal nevertheless feels. Some of us have felt at times that our lives would have been cheaply spent a thousand times over by the bloodiest and most cruel deaths, if we could save our hearers; and there have been moments of passion when we have been ready to say, "Ah, if even my destruction could save them, I could almost go that length." Why this is Christ's method: this is Christ's method. "He saved others, himself he could not save." It may be an extravagance in us, since we are not able to redeem our brother or give to God a ransom, but it is a blessed extravagance. Men are extravagantly prudent nowadays, extravagantly dubious, extravagantly profane; and some of them extravagantly able to deny what their conscience must know is true; they may therefore well permit the minister of Christ to be extravagant in his love for others. I like a bit of hyperbole in our hymns, for instance I admire the extravagance of that verse of Addison's:—

"But, oh, eternity's too short
To utter half his praise."

A gentleman said to me, "That cannot be, because eternity cannot be short, and therefore it cannot be too short." If the Lord had put a drop of poetry into that critic's nature he would not have dealt so hardly with the poet's language: and if the same Lord had put a little of the

fire of grace into the nature of some hard-headed commentators, they would have understood that this passage is not meant to be cut to pieces and discussed, but it is intended to be taken boiling hot and poured upon the enemy, after the fashion of the olden times, when they poured melted lead or boiling pitch upon the besiegers who wished to take a tower or city. Such a text as this must be fired off red-hot; it spoils if it cools. It is a heart business, not a head business. The apostle means us to understand that there was nothing which he would not suffer if he might save his kindred according to the flesh.

III. Well, now, I close my sermon by speaking upon **THE KNOWLEDGENCES OF THIS SPIRIT**, because I pray the Lord to work it in each of you. I wish all felt it, but there are generally some in every church who will never warm up to the right point. If we could once get the whole church up to blood heat we might be content. I never want you to get to fever heat, but to blood heat—the heat of the blood of Christ—to love as he loved. Oh, to get there and to keep there!

Well, what would be the result, if we did feel as Paul did?

The first effect would be *likeness to Christ*. After that manner he loved. He did become a curse for us. He did enter under the awful shadow of Jehovah's wrath for us. He *did* what Paul *could* wish, but could not do. He passed under the awful sword that we might be delivered from its edge for ever. Brethren, I want you to feel that you would pass under poverty if you could save souls better by being poor; that you would gladly endure sickness if from your sick bed you could speak better for Christ than now; ay, and that you would be ready to die, if your death might give life to those dear to you. I heard of a dear girl the other day, who said to her pastor "I could never bring my father to hear you, but I have prayed for him long, and God will answer my request. Now, dear pastor," she said, "you will bury me, won't you? My father must come and hear you speak at my grave. Do speak to him. God will bless him." And he did, and her father was converted. The death of his child brought him to Christ. Oh to be willing to die if others may be saved from the death eternal. God give us just such a spirit as that. This should be our constant feeling; how else can we become like Christ?

If we have this spirit it will *save us from selfishness*. They say—but it is a great falsehood—that we teach people to look after their own salvation, and then being saved we bid them wrap themselves up in self-content. Was anything ever spoken more contrary to fact? We do urge men to seek to be saved from sin. How can they bear to abide in it? But the first instinct of a saved soul, to which we continually appeal, is a longing to bring others to Christ. Yet, brethren, lest there should grow up in your spirit any of that Pharisaic selfishness which was seen in the elder brother in the parable, ask to feel a heaviness for your prodigal younger brother, who is still feeding swine. Pray for him that he may come to his father's house. It will keep your soul sweet if you open the window of sympathy, and let the heavenly air of love blow through you.

This will *save you from any difficulty about forgiving other people*. I do not suppose that Paul *forgave* the Jews for what they did to him, because he never went the length of thinking that he had anything to

forgive. He loved them so much that he took their ill usage without anger or resentment. He loved them, therefore he bore with them. You will bear with those who scoff at you, and you will put up with the idleness of the boys and girls in your class, if you love them. Love mankind with all your soul, and you will feel no difficulty in exercising patience, forbearance, and forgiveness.

This spirit will also *keep you from very many other griefs*. Some people are always fretty for want of something to fret about. No people are more uneasy than those who have nothing to do, and nothing to think about; such persons keep a little growlery in the house, and use it as a trouble factory, where they invent grievances. There are people that I know of who ought to be as merry as the birds of the morning, and yet they are always worrying and stewing about nothing at all. Now, the best way to kill one grief is to introduce another. John Foster wrote of the expulsive power of a new affection, and I want you to experience it. Get love for the souls of men—then you will not be whining about a dead dog, or a sick cat, or about the crotchets of a family, and the little disturbances that John and Mary may make by their idle talk. You will be delivered from petty worries (I need not further describe them) if you are concerned about the souls of men. When certain persons come to me with their sentimental sorrows, I wish the Lord would fill them with the love of souls, and make their hearts break with anxiety for their conversion: then would their griefs be of a nobler sort. You would no longer weep over a mole-hill if you began to move mountains. Get your soul full of a great grief, and your little griefs will be driven out. These thoughts of Paul about his brethren cause us to feel that we too may make our lives sublime, if in our hearts there shall burn the self-same ardent affection towards our fellow-men.

If you are moved by this feeling, *it will put you much upon prayer*. You will bring one and another before God, because you cannot help it. That is the right style of praying—when a man does not pray to order at a set time because it is his rule, but prays because he has an awful weight upon him, and pray he must. You cannot force yourself to this, but when the Spirit of God has brought you to it you will pray day and night for those whom you love. As you go down the road something will suggest your praying for them. The very oaths and blasphemies so common in our streets will make you pray for sinners. A gracious meeting where some are saved will move you to prayer. A thousand things will lead you to pray, and that prayer will lead you to effort—to proper and fitting effort. It is wonderful how a man can talk to souls when he loves them. If any one of you should say, “I do not feel any particular concern about other people’s souls, but still I will look out for somebody and speak to him:” you will fail in it, brother. You must love before you can plead. You must have such a concern for a man that you feel—even if I could not say anything still I could put my hand on his shoulder and blunder out, “Friend, I am concerned about your salvation” The evident concern of your spirit will be one of God’s ways of touching the hearts of others. I suppose his Spirit has used deep emotion more than almost any other instrument in arousing careless minds.

Now to-night a good many of our friends are away, for the lawful claims of business detain them at this season. I hope that you who have come hither on such a week-evening are among those who aspire to the highest things in the kingdom of God. Do so, I pray you: they are all before you, and within reach: and among them aspire after great sensitiveness as to others. Let other men's sins grieve you. Let their eternal destiny be often on your mind. No better spur can be wanted. You will labour for their good in proportion as you feel for them. I do not think that I can ask a better thing for the unconverted than that the converted may be in heaviness over them. We long to see many enquirers coming forward. Very well. Enquiring saints always bring enquiring sinners. "For this will I be enquired of by the house of Israel"—not by the sinners first of all—but "by the house of Israel, to do it for them." My brethren, go and enquire at the Lord's hands, and then you will soon prove a blessing to others.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Rom. ix. 1—5, and Rom. x.

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THE LIFTING UP OF THE BOWED DOWN.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 14TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God."—Luke xiii. 10—13.

I BELIEVE that the infirmity of this woman was not only physical but spiritual: her outward appearance was the index of her deep and long-continued depression of mind. She was bent double as to her body, and she was bowed down by sadness as to her mind. There is always a sympathy between body and soul, but it is not always so plainly seen as in her case; many sad sights would meet us on all hands if it were so. Imagine for a moment what would be the result upon the present congregation if our outward forms were to set forth our inward states. If some one having an eye like that of the Saviour could gaze upon us now, and could see the inward in the outward, what would be the appearance of this crowd? Very deplorable sights would be seen, for in many a pew dead persons would be sitting, looking forth from the glassy eyes of death, bearing the semblance of life and a name to live, but all the while being dead as to spiritual things. My friend, you would shudder as you found yourself placed next to a corpse. Alas, the corpse would not shudder, but would remain as insensible as ungodly persons usually are, though the precious truth of the gospel rings in their ears—ears which hear but hear in vain. A large number of souls will be found in all congregations, "dead in trespasses and sins," and yet sitting as God's people sit, and not to be discerned from the living in Zion. Even in those cases in which there is spiritual life the aspect would not be altogether lovely. Here we should see a man blind, and there another another maimed; and a third twisted from perfect uprightness. Spiritual deformity assumes many forms, and each form is painful to look upon.

A paralysed man with a trembling faith, set forth by a trembling body, would be an uncomfortable neighbour, and a person subject to fits of passion or despair would be equally undesirable if his body suffered from fits also. How sad it would be to have around us persons with a fever upon them, or shivering with ague, hot and cold by turns, burning almost to fanaticism at one moment and then chilled as with a northern wind with utter indifference. I will not try to sketch in further detail the halt, lame, blind and impotent folk who are assembled in this Bethesda. Surely if the flesh were shaped according to the spirit this Tabernacle would be turned into an hospital, and each man would flee from his fellow, and wish to run from himself. If to any one of us our inward ailments were to be set forth upon our brow, I warrant you we should not linger long at the glass, nor scarcely dare to think upon the wretched objects which there our eyes would behold. Let us quit the imaginary scene with this consoling thought, that Jesus is among us notwithstanding that we be sick folk, and although he sees nothing to delight his eye if he judgeth us according to the law, yet, since his mercy delights to relieve human misery, there is abundant scope for him here in the midst of these thousands of ailing souls.

In that synagogue on the Sabbath this poor woman described in the text must have been one of the least observed. Her particular disease would render her very short in stature ; she was dwarfed to almost half her original height, and in consequence, like other very short persons, she would be almost lost in a standing crowd. A person so bent down as she was might have come in and gone out and not have been noticed by anyone standing upon the floor of the meeting-place ; but I can imagine that our Lord occupied a somewhat elevated position, as he was teaching in the synagogue, for he had probably gone to one of the higher places for the greater convenience of being seen and heard, and for this reason he could more readily see her than others could. Jesus always occupies a place from which he can spy out those who are bowed down. His quick eye did not miss its mark. She, poor soul, was naturally the least observed of all the people in the company, yet was she the most observed, for our Lord's gracious eye glanced over all the rest, but it lighted upon her with fixed regard. There his tender look remained till he had wrought the deed of love. Peradventure, there is some one in the crowd this morning the least observed of anybody, who is yet noticed by the Saviour ; for he seeth not as man seeth, but observes most those whom man passes over as beneath his regard. Nobody knows you, nobody cares for you ; your peculiar trouble is quite unknown, and you would not reveal it for the world. You feel quite alone ; there is no solitude like that which is to be found in a dense throng ; and you are in that solitude now. Be not, however, quite despairing, for you have a friend left. The preacher's heart is going after you, but that will little help you : there is far more joy in the fact that as our Master observed most the least observed one on that Sabbath in the synagogue, so we trust he will do this day, and his eye shall light on you, even you. He will not pass you by, but will deal out a special Sabbath blessing to your weary heart. Though by yourself accounted to be among the last, you shall now be put upon the first by the Lord's working a notable miracle of love upon you. In the hope that this may be so we will proceed, by the help of

the Holy Spirit, to look into the gracious deed which was done to this poor woman.

I. Our first subject for consideration is, **THE BOWING DOWN OF THE AFFLICTED.** We read of this woman that "she had a spirit of infirmity and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself." Upon which we remark first, that *she had lost all her natural brightness.* I can imagine that when she was a girl she was light of foot as a young roe, that her face was dimpled with many a smile, and that her eyes flashed with childish glee. She had her share of the brightness and beauty of youth, and walked erect like others of her race, looking up to the sun by day, and to the sparkling stars at night, rejoicing in all around her, and feeling life to be a joy. But there gradually crept over her an infirmity which dragged her down, probably a weakness of the spine: either the muscles and ligatures began to tighten so that she was bound together, and drawn more and more towards herself and towards the earth; or else the muscles commenced to relax, so that she could not retain the perpendicular position, and her body dropped forward more and more. I suppose either of these causes might cause her to be bowed together, so that she could in nowise lift herself up. At any rate, for eighteen years she had not gazed upon the sun; for eighteen years no star of night had gladdened her eye; her face was drawn downward towards the dust, and all the light of her life was dim: she walked about as if she were searching for a grave, and I do not doubt she often felt that it would have been gladness to have found one. She was as truly fettered as if bound in iron, and as much in prison as if surrounded by stone walls. Alas, we know certain of the children of God who are at this moment in much the same condition. They are perpetually bowed down, and though they recollect happier days the memory only serves to deepen their present gloom. They sometimes sing in the minor key:

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the sweet refreshing view
Of Jesus and his word?"

"What blissful hours I then enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill."

They seldom enter into communion with God now; seldom or never behold the face of the Well-beloved. They try to hold on by believing, and they succeed; but they have little peace, little comfort, little joy: they have lost the crown and flower of spiritual life, though that life still remains. I feel certain that I am addressing more than two or three who are in such a plight at this moment, and I pray the Comforter to bless my discourse to them.

This poor woman was *bowed towards herself and towards that which was depressing.* She seemed to grow downwards; her life was stooping; she bent lower and lower and lower, as the weight of years pressed upon her. Her looks were all earthward; nothing heavenly, nothing bright could come before her eyes; her views were narrowed to the dust, and to the grave. So are there some of God's people whose thoughts sink evermore

like lead, and their feelings run in a deep groove, cutting evermore a lower channel. You cannot give them delight, but you can readily cause them alarm : by a strange art they squeeze the juice of sorrow from the clusters of Eshcol ; where others would leap for joy they stoop for very grief, for they draw the unhappy inference that joyous things are not meant for the like of them. Cordials expressly prepared for mourners they dare not accept, and the more comforting they are the more are they afraid to appropriate them. If there is a dark passage in the word of God they are sure to read it, and say, "That applies to me" : if there is a thundering portion in a sermon they recollect every syllable of it, and although they wonder how the preacher knows them so well, yet they are sure that he aimed every word at them. If anything occurs in providence, either adverse or propitious, instead of reading it as a token for good, whether they might rationally do so or not, they manage to translate it into a sign of evil. "All these things are against me," say they, for they can see nothing but the earth, and can imagine nothing but fear and distress.

We have known certain prudent, but somewhat unfeeling, persons blame these people, and chide them for being low spirited ; and that brings us to notice next, *that she could not lift up herself*. There was no use in blaming her. There may have been a time, perhaps, when her older sisters said, "Sister, you should keep yourself more upright ; you should not be so round shouldered ; you are getting quite out of figure ; you must be careful or you will become deformed." Dear me, what good advice some people can give ! Advice is usually given gratis, and this is very proper, since in most cases that is its full value. Advice given to persons who become depressed in spirit is usually unwise, and causes pain and aggravation of spirit. I sometimes wish that those who are so ready with their advice had themselves suffered a little, for then, perhaps, they would have the wisdom to hold their tongues. Of what use is it to advise a blind person to see, or to tell one who cannot lift up herself that she ought to be upright, and should not look so much upon the earth ? This is a needless increase of misery. Some persons who pretend to be comforters might more fitly be classed with tormentors. A spiritual infirmity is as real as a physical one. When Satan binds a soul it is as truly bound as when a man binds an ox or an ass. It cannot get free, it is of necessity in bondage ; and that was the condition of this poor woman. I may be speaking to some who have bravely attempted to rally their spirits : they have tried change of scene, they have gone into godly company, they have asked Christian people to comfort them, they have frequented the house of God, and read consoling books ; but still they are bound, and there is no disputing it. As one that poureth vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to a sad heart : there is an incongruity about the choicest joys when forced upon broken spirits. Some distressed souls are so sick that they abhor all manner of meat, and draw near unto the gates of death. Yet, if any one of my hearers be in this plight he may not despair, for Jesus can lift up those who are most bowed down.

The worst point, perhaps, about the poor woman's case was that *she had borne her trouble for eighteen years*, and therefore her disease was chronic and her illness confirmed. Eighteen years ! It is a long, long

time. Eighteen years of happiness!—the years fly like Mercuries, with wings to their heels: they come, and they are gone. Eighteen years of happy life,—how short a span! But eighteen years of pain, eighteen years of being bowed down to the earth, eighteen years in which the body approximated rather to the fashion of a brute than to that of a man, what a period this must be! Eighteen long years—each with twelve dreary months dragging like a chain behind it! She had been eighteen years under the bond of the devil; what a woe was this! Can a child of God be eighteen years in despondency? I am bound to answer “yes.” There is one instance, that of Mr. Timothy Rogers, who has written a book upon Religious Melancholy, a very wonderful book too, who was, I think, twenty-eight years in despondency: he tells the story himself, and there can be no question as to his accuracy. Similar instances are well known to those familiar with religious biographies. Individuals have been locked up for many years in the gloomy den of despair, and yet after all have been singularly brought out into joy and comfort. Eighteen years’ despondency must be a frightful affliction, and yet there is an escape out of it, for though the devil may take eighteen years to forge a chain, it does not take our blessed Lord eighteen minutes to break it. He can soon set the captive free. Build, build thy dungeons, O Fiend of Hell, and lay the foundations deep, and place the courses of granite so fast together that none can stir a stone of thy fabric; but when HE comes, thy Master who will destroy all thy works, HE doth but speak, and like the unsubstantial fabric of a vision thy Bastille vanishes into thin air. Eighteen years of melancholy do not prove that Jesus cannot set the captive free; they only offer him an opportunity for displaying his gracious power.

Note further about this poor woman, that bowed down as she was both in mind and body, *she yet frequented the house of prayer*. Our Lord was in the synagogue, and there was she. She might very well have said, “It is very painful for me to go into a public place; I ought to be excused.” But no, there she was. Dear child of God, the devil has sometimes suggested to you that it is vain for you to go any more to hear the word. Go all the same. He knows you are likely to escape from his hands so long as you hear the word, and therefore if he can keep you away he will do so. It was while in the house of prayer that this woman found her liberty, and there *you* may find it; therefore still continue to go up to the house of the Lord, come what may.

All this while, too, she was a daughter of Abraham. The devil had tied her up like an ox or an ass, but he could not take away her privileged character. She was still a daughter of Abraham, still a believing soul trusting in God by humble faith. When the Saviour healed her he did not say, “Thy sins be forgiven thee.” There was no particular sin in the case. He did not address her as he did those whose infirmity had been caused by sin; for, notwithstanding her being thus bowed down, all she needed was comfort, not rebuke. Her heart was right with God. I know it was, for the moment she was healed she began to glorify God, which showed that she was ready for it, and that the praise was waiting in her spirit for the glad opportunity. In going up to the house of God, she felt some measure of comfort, though for eighteen years she was bowed down. Where else should she have gone? What good could she

have gained by staying at home? A sick child is best in its father's house, and she was best where prayer was wont to be made.

Here, then, is a picture of what may still be seen among the sons of men, and may possibly be your case, dear hearer. May the Holy Spirit bless this description to your hearts' encouragement.

II. I invite you, secondly, to notice **THE HAND OF SATAN IN THIS BONDAGE**. We should not have known it if our Lord had not told us, that it was Satan who had bound this poor woman for eighteen years. *He must have bound her very cunningly to make the knot hold all that time*, for he does not appear to have possessed her. You notice in reading the evangelists that our Lord never laid his hand on a person possessed with a devil. Satan had not *possessed* her, but he had fallen upon her once upon a time eighteen years before, and bound her up as men tie a beast in its stable, and she had not been able to get free all that while. The devil can tie in a moment a knot which you and I cannot unloose in eighteen years. He had in this case so securely fastened his victim that no power of herself or others could avail: in the same way when permitted he can tie up any one of God's own people in a very short time, and by almost any means. Perhaps one word from a preacher, which was never meant to cause sadness, may make a heart wretched; one single sentence out of a good book, or one misunderstood passage of Scripture, may be quite enough in Satan's cunning hand to fasten up a child of God in a long bondage.

Satan had bound the woman to herself and to the earth. There is a cruel way of tying a beast which is somewhat after the same fashion: I have seen a poor animal's head fastened to its knee or foot, and somewhat after that fashion Satan had bound the woman downward to herself. So there are some children of God whose thoughts are all about themselves: they have turned their eyes so that they look inside and see only the transactions of the little world within themselves. They are always lamenting their own infirmities, always mourning their own corruptions, always watching their own emotions. The one and only subject of their thoughts is their own condition. If they ever change the scene and turn to another subject it is only to gaze upon the earth beneath them, to groan over this poor world with its sorrows, its miseries, its sins, and its disappointments. Thus they are tied to themselves and to the earth, and cannot look up to Christ as they should, nor let the sunlight of his love shine full upon them. They go mourning without the sun, pressed down with cares and burdens. Our Lord uses the figure of an ox or an ass tied up, and he says that even on the Sabbath its owner would loose it for watering.

This poor woman was restrained from what her soul needed. She was like an ass or an ox which cannot get to the trough to drink. She knew the promises, she heard them read every Sabbath day; she went to the synagogue and heard of him who comes to loose the captives; but she could not rejoice in the promise or enter into liberty. So are there multitudes of God's dear people who are fastened to themselves and cannot get to watering, cannot drink from the river of life, nor find consolation in the Scriptures. They know how precious the gospel is, and how consolatory are the blessings of the covenant; but they cannot enjoy the

consolations or the blessings. Oh that they could. They sigh and cry, but they feel themselves to be bound.

There is a saving clause here. Satan had done a good deal to the poor woman, but *he had done all he could do*. You may rest assured that whenever Satan smites a child of God he never spares his strength. He knows nothing of mercy, neither does any other consideration restrain him. When the Lord delivered Job into Satan's hand for a time, what destruction and havoc he made with Job's property. He did not save him chick or child, or sheep, or goat, or camel, or ox; but he smote him right and left, and caused ruin to his whole estate. When, under a second permit, he came to touch him in his bone and in his flesh, nothing would satisfy the devil but covering him from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head with sore boils and blains. He might have pained him quite sufficiently by torturing one part of his body, but this would not suffice, he must glut himself with vengeance. The devil would do all he could, and therefore he covered him with running sores. Yet, as in Job's case, there was a limit, so was there here; Satan had bound this woman, but he had not killed her. He might bend her towards the grave, but he could not bend her into it; he might make her droop over till she was bent double, but he could not take away her poor feeble life: with all his infernal craft he could not make her die before her time. Moreover, she was still a woman, and he could not make a beast of her, notwithstanding that she was thus bowed down into the form of the brute. Even so the devil cannot destroy you, O child of God. He can smite you, but he cannot slay you. He worries those whom he cannot destroy, and feels a malicious joy in so doing. He knows there is no hope of your destruction, for you are beyond shot of his gun; but if he cannot wound you with the shot he will frighten you with the powder if he can. If he cannot slay he will bind, as if for the slaughter; ay, and he knows how to make a poor soul feel a thousand deaths in fearing one. But all this while Satan was quite unable to touch this poor woman as to her true standing: she was a daughter of Abraham eighteen years before when first the devil attacked her, and she was a daughter of Abraham eighteen years afterwards, when the fiend had done his worst. And you, dear heart, if you should never have a comfortable sense of the Lord's love for eighteen years, are still his beloved; and if never once he should give you any token of his love which you could sensibly enjoy, and if by reason of bewilderment and distraction you should keep on writing bitter things against yourself all this while, yet still your name is on the hands of Christ, where none can erase it. You belong to Jesus, and none shall pluck you out of his hands. The devil may bind you fast, but Christ has bound you faster still with cords of everlasting love, which must and shall hold you to the end.

That poor woman was being prepared, even by the agency of the devil, to glorify God. Nobody in the synagogue could glorify God as she could when she was at last set free. Every year out of the eighteen gave emphasis to the utterance of her thanksgiving. The deeper her sorrow the sweeter her song. I should like to have been there that morning, to have heard her tell the story of the emancipating power of the Christ of God. The devil must have felt that he had lost all his trouble; and he must have regretted that he had not let her alone all the

eighteen years, since he had only been qualifying her thereby to tell out the more sweetly the story of Jesus' wondrous power.

III. I want you to notice in the third place **THE LIBERATOR AT HIS WORK.** We have seen the woman bound by the devil, but here comes the Liberator, and the first thing we read of him is that *he saw her*. His eyes looked round, reading every heart as he glanced from one to another. At last he saw the woman. Yes, that was the very one he was seeking. We are not to think that he saw her in the same common way as I see one of you, but he read every line of her character and history, every thought of her heart, every desire of her soul. Nobody had told him that she had been eighteen years bound, but he knew all about it,—how she came to be bound, what she had suffered during the time, how she had prayed for healing, and how the infirmity still pressed upon her. In one minute he had read her history and understood her case. He saw her; and oh, what meaning there was in his searching glance. Our Lord had wonderful eyes; all the painters in the world will never be able to produce a satisfactory picture of Christ, because they cannot copy those expressive eyes. Heaven lay calmly reposing in his eyes; they were not only bright and penetrating, but they were full of a melting power, a tenderness irresistible, a strength which secured confidence. As he looked at the poor woman I doubt not the tears started from our Lord's eyes, but they were not tears of unmingled sorrow, for he knew that he could heal her, and he anticipated the joy of doing so.

When he had gazed upon her, *he called her to him*. Did he know her name? Oh, yes, he knows all our names, and his calling is therefore personal and unmistakeable. "I have called thee by thy name," saith he, "thou art mine." See, there is the poor creature, coming up the aisle; that pitiful mass of sorrow, though bowed to the earth, is moving. Is it a woman at all? You can hardly see that she has a face, but she is coming towards him who called her. She could not stand upright, but she could come *as she was*—bent and infirm as she was. I rejoice in my Master's way of healing people, for he comes to them where they are. He does not propose to them that if they will do somewhat he will do the rest, but he begins and ends. He bids them approach him as they are, and does not ask them to mend or prepare. May my blessed Master this morning look on some of you till you feel, "The preacher means me, the preacher's Master means me," and then may there sound a voice in your ears saying, "Come to Jesus just as you are." Then may you have grace to reply—

"Just as I am—poor, wretched, blind,
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I need, in Thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come."

When the woman came, *the great Liberator said to her*, "*Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.*" How could that be true? She was still as bent as she was before. He meant that the spell of Satan was taken off from her, that the power which had made her thus to bow herself was broken. This she believed in her inmost soul, even as Jesus said it, though as yet she was not at all different in appearance from her former state. Oh, that some of you who are God's dear people would

have power to believe this morning that the end of your gloom has come,—power to believe that your eighteen years are over, and that your time of doubt and despondency is ended. I pray that God may give you grace to know that when this morning's sun first gilded the east, light was ordained for you. Behold, I come to-day to publish the glad message from the Lord. Come forth, ye prisoners, leap ye captives, for Jesus comes to set you free to-day. The woman was liberated, but she could not actually enjoy the liberty, and I will tell you why directly. Our Lord proceeded to give her full enlargement in his own way: *he laid his hands on her*. She suffered from want of strength, and by putting his hands upon her, I conceive that the Lord poured his life into her. The warm stream of his own infinite power and vitality came into contact with the lethargic stream of her painful existence, and so quickened it that she lifted up herself. The deed of love was done: Jesus himself had done it. Beloved mourners, if we could get you away this morning from thinking about yourselves to thinking about our Lord Jesus, and from looking down upon your cares to thinking of him, what a change would come over you. If his hands could be laid upon you, those dear pierced hands which bought you, those mighty hands which rule heaven and earth on your behalf, those blessed hands which are outstretched to plead for sinners, those dear hands which will press you to his bosom for ever: if you could feel these by thinking of him, then would you soon recover your early joy, and renew the elasticity of your spirit, and the bowing down of your soul would pass away like a night dream, to be forgotten for ever. O Spirit of the Lord, make it to be so.

IV. I will not linger there, but invite you now to notice THE LOOSING OF THE BOUND. *She was made straight* we are told, and that at once. Now, what I want you to notice is this, that she must have lifted herself up—that was her own act and deed. No pressure or force was put upon her, she lifted up herself; and yet she was “*made straight*.” She was passive in so much as a miracle was wrought upon her, but she was active too, and, being enabled, she lifted up herself. What a wonderful meeting there is here of the active and the passive in the salvation of men. The Arminian says to the sinner, “Now, sinner, you are a responsible being; you must do this and that.” The Calvinist says, “Truly, sinner, you are responsible enough, but you are also unable to do anything of yourself. God must work in you both to will and to do.” What shall we do with these two teachers? They fell to fighting, a hundred years ago, most frightfully. We will not let them fight now, but what shall we do with them? We will let both speak, and believe what is true in both their testimonies. Is it true what the Arminian says, that there must be an effort on the sinner's part or he will never be saved? Unquestionably it is. As soon as ever the Lord gives spiritual life there is spiritual activity. Nobody is ever lugged into heaven by his ears, or carried there asleep on a feather bed. God deals with us as with responsible, intelligent beings. That is true, and what is the use of denying it? Now, what has the Calvinist to say? He says that the sinner is bound by the infirmity of sin, and cannot lift up himself, and when he does so, it is God that does it all, and the Lord must have all the glory of it. Is not that true too? “Oh,” says the Arminian, “I never denied that the

Lord is to have the glory. I will sing a hymn with you to the divine honour; and I will pray the same prayer with you for the divine power." All Christians are thorough Calvinists when they come to singing and praying, but it is a pity to doubt as a doctrine what we profess on our knees and in our songs. It is most true that Jesus alone saves the sinner, and equally true that the sinner believes unto salvation. The Holy Ghost never believed on behalf of anybody: a man must believe for himself and repent for himself, or be lost; but yet there never was a grain of true faith or true repentance in this world except it was produced by the Holy Ghost. I am not going to explain these difficulties, because they are not difficulties, except in theory. They are plain facts of practical everyday life. The poor woman knew at any rate where to put the crown; she did not say, "I straightened myself," no, but she glorified God, and attributed all the work to his gracious power.

The most remarkable fact is that *she was made straight immediately*; for there was something beyond her infirmity to be overcome. Suppose that any person had been diseased of the spine, or of the nerves and muscles for eighteen years, even if the disease which occasioned his being deformed could be entirely removed, what would be the effect? Why, that the result of the disease would still remain, for the body would have become set through long continuance in one posture. You have doubtless heard of the fakirs and others in India: a man will hold his hand up for years in pursuance of a vow, but when the years of his penance are over, he cannot bring his hand down: it has become fixed and immovable. In this case the bond which held the poor bowed body was taken away, and at the same time the consequent rigidity was removed, and she in a moment stood up straight; this was a double display of miraculous power. O my poor tried friend, if the Lord will visit you this morning he will not only take away the first and greatest cause of your sadness, but the very tendency to melancholy shall depart; the long grooves which you have worn shall be smoothed, the ruts in the road of sorrow which you have worn by long continuance in sadness shall be filled up, and you shall be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

The cure being thus perfect, *up rose the woman to glorify God*. I wish I had been there; I have been wishing so all the morning. I should have liked to have seen that hypocritical ruler of the synagogue when he made his angry speech: I should have liked to have seen him when the Master silenced him so thoroughly; but especially I should have rejoiced to have seen this poor woman standing upright, and to have heard her praise the Lord. What did she say? It is not recorded, but we can well imagine. It was something like this: "I have been eighteen years in and out among you; you have seen me, and know what a poor, miserable, wretched object I was; but God has lifted me up all in a moment. Blessed be his name, I have been made straight." What she spoke with her mouth was not half of what she expressed. No reporter could have taken it down; she spoke with her eyes, she spoke with her hands, she spoke with every limb of her body. I suppose she moved about to see if she was really straight, and to make sure that it was not all a delusion. She must have been all over a living mass of pleasure, and by every movement she praised God from the sole of the

foot to the crown of the head. Never was there a more eloquent woman in the universe. She was like one new-born, delivered from a long death, joyous with all the novelty of a fresh life. Well might she glorify God.

She made no mistake as to how the cure was wrought; she traced it to a divine power, and that divine power she extolled. Brother, sister, cannot you glorify Christ this morning that he has set you free? Though bound so long you need not be bound any longer. Christ is able to deliver you. Trust him, believe him, be made straight, and then go and tell your kinsfolk and acquaintances, "You knew how depressed I was, for you cheered me in my sorrow as best you could, but now I have to tell you what the Lord has done for my soul."

V. Fifthly, let us reflect upon OUR REASON FOR EXPECTING THE LORD JESUS TO DO THE SAME THING TO-DAY as he did eighteen hundred years and more ago. What was his reason for setting this woman free? According to his own statement it was, first of all, *human kindness*. He says, "When you have your ox, or your ass tied up, and you see that it is thirsty, you untie the knot, and lead the poor creature away down to the river, or the tank, to water. None of you would leave an ox tied up to famish." This is good reasoning, and leads us to believe that Jesus will help sorrowing ones. Tried soul, wouldst thou not loose an ox or an ass if thou sawest it suffering? "Ay," sayest thou. And dost thou think the Lord wilt not loose thee? Hast thou more bowels of mercy than the Christ of God? Come, come, think not so meanly of my Master. If thy heart would lead thee to pity an ass, dost thou think his heart will not lead him to pity thee? He has not forgotten thee: he remembers thee still. His tender humanity moves him to set thee free.

More than that, there was *special relationship*. He tells this master of the synagogue that a man would loose *his* ox or *his* ass. Perhaps he might not think it his business to go and loose that which belonged to another man, but it is his own ass, his own ox, and he will loose him. And dost thou think, dear heart, that the Lord Jesus will not loose thee? He bought thee with his blood, his Father gave thee to him, he has loved thee with an everlasting love: will he not loose thee? Thou art his property. Dost thou not know that he sweeps his house to find his lost groat, that he runs over hill and dale to find his lost sheep? And will he not come and loose his poor tied-up ox or ass? Will he not liberate his captive daughter? Assuredly he will. Art thou a daughter of Abraham, a child of faith, and will he not set thee free? Depend upon it he will.

Next, there was a *point of antagonism* which moved the Saviour to act promptly. He says, "This woman being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound." Now, if I knew the devil had tied anything up I am sure I would try to unloose it, would not you? We may be sure some mischief is brewing when the devil is working, and, therefore, it must be a good deed to undo his work. But Jesus Christ came into the world on purpose to destroy the works of the devil; and so when he saw the woman like a tied-up ox he said, "I will unloose her if for nothing else that I may undo what the devil has done." Now, dear tried friend, inasmuch as thy sorrow may be traced to Satanic influence, Jesus Christ

will prove in thy case more than a match for the devil, and he will set thee free.

Then think of *her sorrowful condition*. An ox or an ass tied up to the manger without water would soon be in a very sad plight. Pity it, poor thing. Hear the lowing of the ox, as hour after hour its thirst tells upon it. Would you not pity it? And do you think the Lord does not pity his poor, tried, tempted, afflicted children? Those tears, shall they fall for nothing? Those sleepless nights, shall they be disregarded? That broken heart which fain would but cannot believe the promise, shall that for ever be denied a hearing? Hath the Lord forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up the bowels of his mercy? Ah, no, he will remember thy sorrowful estate and hear thy groanings, for he puts thy tears into his bottle.

Last of all, there was this reason to move the heart of Christ, that *she had been eighteen years in that state*. "Then," said he, "she shall be loosed at once." The master of the synagogue would have said, "She has been eighteen years bound, and she may well wait till to-morrow, for it is only one day." "Nay," saith Christ, "if she has been bound eighteen years, she shall not wait a minute; she has had too much of it already; she shall be set free at once." Do not, therefore, argue from the length of your despondency that it shall not come to an end, but rather argue from it that release is near. The night has been so long, it must be so much nearer the dawning. You have been scourged so long that it must be so much nearer the last stroke, for the Lord doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. Therefore take heart and be of a good courage. Oh, that my divine Master would now come and do what I fain would do but cannot, namely, make every child of God here leap for joy.

I know what this being bound by Satan means. The devil has not tied me up for eighteen years at a stretch, and I do not think he ever will, but he has brought me into sad bondage many a time. Still, my Master comes and sets me free, and leads me out to watering: and what a drink I get at such times! I seem as if I could drink up Jordan at a draught when I get to his promises, and quaff my fill of his sweet love. I know by this that he will lead other poor souls out to the watering; and when he does so to any of you I pray you drink like an ox. You may be tied up again; therefore drink as much as you can of his grace, and rejoice while you may. Eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight in fatness. Be glad in the Lord, ye righteous, and shout for joy all ye that are upright in heart, for the Lord looses the prisoners. May he loose many now. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm: lxxv.;
Luke xiii. 1—17.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—258, 40, 607.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A WILDERNESS CRY.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 4TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary."—Psalm lxxiii. 1, 2.

CHRYSOSTOM tells us that among the primitive Christians it was decreed and ordained that no day should pass without the public singing of this psalm; and certainly, if we do not follow the ancient custom and actually sing the words every day, it is not because they are unsuitable, or because their spirit has died out among us. This psalm may be said or sung all the year round. Have we joyous days? Let us sing of the lovingkindness which is better than love. Do the clouds return after the rain? Let us sound forth his praise whose right hand upholdeth us. Is it summer time with our souls? Then may we express the full assurance of our faith by joyfully crying, "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee." Have we fallen upon the drought of autumn? Do the long hot days parch our spirits? Then may we chant the lay of our longing heart, "My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." Is it winter with our spirit, and does everything tend to chill us? nevertheless let us not be silenced or rendered sluggish by the cold, but let us say, "I will bless thee while I live, I will lift up my hands in thy name." Has the spring returned with all its wealth of fresh flowers and opening sweets? Then shall our glad voices sing aloud, "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips." Is the day ended, and has the darkness of night settled down upon our mind? Then in the language of the psalm we will remember God upon our bed, and meditate upon him in the night watches, and because he has been our help therefore in the shadow of his wings we will rejoice. We may sing this psalm in the days of battle, when those are round about us who seek our soul to destroy it, for "they shall fall by the sword, they shall be a portion for foxes;" and we may chant it with equal appropriateness in the time of victory, when we

return from the conflict with banners gleaming in the sunlight of triumph, for "the king shall rejoice in God: every one that sweareth by him shall glory." I know of no time and no season in which this psalm would sound unsuitably from a believing tongue. Let us cultivate its earnestness; let us endeavour to be baptized into its spirit, let us live while we live after the fashion of holy men like David, the psalmist, whose assurance of heart sorrow could not shake, whose fertility of mind the desert could not wither, whose joy of spirit solitude could not destroy.

This psalm, however, especially belongs to any who by their circumstances or by their state of heart feel themselves to dwell in a desert land. There is a stage of Christian experience in which we are in Egypt, and we are brought up out of it with a high hand and an outstretched arm. This symbolizes conviction, regeneration, and conversion. Then we know the passover and the sprinkling of the blood, the enemies drowned in the sea and the new song put into the mouth. Happy are they who have come thus far on their life journey. Then comes the stage of spiritual history which may be well described as wilderness experience, wherein we have little rest, much temptation, and consequent proving of heart and discovery of inward weakness. Many remain in this condition far longer than there is any need: what might be soon ended is drawn out into forty years by unbelief. Then comes that blessed stage of experience in which faith begets peace and joy; then we have crossed the Jordan and entered into rest in Christ Jesus, "in whom also we have obtained an inheritance." In the man who is our peace we obtain an earnest of heaven and begin to divide the land of promise; "for he hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places." Each man claims his lot in covenant provisions, and sits under his own vine and fig-tree, none making him afraid. Yet even after we have been raised up together with Jesus, and have obtained citizenship in Zion, we may find ourselves in the wilderness. As David, though king in Israel, had to flee across the Jordan to escape from Absalom, so may the most assured and the most sanctified of God's people be driven for awhile into the dry and thirsty land, where no water is, and there hide himself from the offspring of his own flesh. There are songs for the Lord's banished ones to sing in a strange land, psalms with which to arouse the silent land, sonnets wherewith to charm the howling wilderness into a fruitful garden, and hymns to make the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose. I purpose to address myself this morning to any of my brethren who feel themselves to be just now in a dry and thirsty land where no water is. It may be the Lord will give them deliverance by his word this morning; or if not delivered out of temporal trouble, they shall at least be made glad by his Holy Spirit and be led to magnify his name while yet in the land of drought.

I. Our first head this morning shall be this. **TRUE SAINTS ARE SOMETIMES IN A DRY AND THIRSTY LAND WHERE NO WATER IS.** Children of God are not always in the same happy state of mind. To hear some people talk, who know but little of religious experience, you would fancy that the Christian's life is all feasting and dancing. Children think that all there is in hunting is wearing a red coat and blowing a horn; they know nothing of the rough riding. We do, it is true, linger

delightfully in the sweet valley of humiliation, where men have found pearls and met with angels. We know that spot of which the pilgrim's guide has said, "Behold, how green this valley is, also how beautiful with lilies," but we can never forget that in this quiet meadow Christian met Apollyon, and was hard put to it in the fight, and but a little farther in his journey he came to the Valley of the Shadow of Death, where there are deep ditches and quagmires, and a narrow pathway which runs hard by the mouth of hell. Sweet rest is to be had in the Palace Beautiful, but there is also a Hill Difficulty to be climbed. Let not the young be deceived by flattering words for they may be sure of this, that there are bitters as well as sweets in the pilgrim life, and he who would be a Christian must not count upon unbroken joy.

All things are changeable. We live in a world which hourly varies. What mean our thermometers and barometers? Are they not measures of perpetual change? The things which live change even more than inanimate objects, and the more of life usually the more of sensitiveness, and the more of sensitiveness so much the more of change. Your man of marble may appear to sweat through the condensation of the vapour around him, but he cannot possibly know anything of that dew of toil which covers the labouring limb. The cast in plaster is ignorant of the joy and the sorrow which flash through the man of flesh and blood. Your painted picture, hanging on the wall, represents a smiling ancestor, who smiles on, although his estates may have been alienated and his family disgraced: but not so the living parent, who anxiously regards each turn in the affairs of his children; for him there are tears as well as smiles. A man of stone changes not, but a man of flesh feels the movement of the years; the plough of time gradually furrows his forehead, and the crow's feet of age appear in the corners of his eyes. Living men must mourn and suffer as well as laugh and rejoice, for minds and hearts must change. Wonder not, therefore, that the glad-hearted sons of Zion are not always in the temple, but sometimes are driven into exile and sigh in a desert land.

But beyond the fact of liability to change there are other reasons why God's people at times are wanderers in the wilderness. *In some senses to a Christian this world must always be a dry and thirsty land.* The new life which grace has implanted in us finds nothing here below upon which it can feed; the things which are seen are too gross, material, carnal, and defiled to sustain life which cometh by the Holy Ghost from the great Father. We are not carrion crows, else might we float upon the carcasses which abound in the waters around our ark: we are doves, and when we leave the hand of our Noah we find nought to rest upon, and we must go back to him if we are to find food and rest for our souls. I am not speaking now of the world under its sorrowful aspect only, but of the world at its best; it is a dry land for saints even when its rains are falling. When the world arrayeth itself in scarlet, and putteth on its silks and satins, it is still a poor world for us. She may paint her face and tire her head, but she is a Jezebel for all that. The world, should she come to us as she came to Solomon, would be still a deceiver; if she would indulge us with all her riches, and give us all her power and all her fame, she would still be a mere mocker to the heart which is born from above. If thou couldst stand on a high mountain

and see all the kingdoms of the world before thee, and the glory thereof, and hear a voice saying, "All this will I give thee;" yet mightest thou turn round to Satan and say, "And all this is nought to me, a sop for a dog, but not food for a child;" and then thou mightest lift thine eye to the great Father above and say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee; and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee?" You shall take prosperity at its flood; you shall have health and strength; you shall have all that heart can wish; but, after all, if there is a spark of divine life within you, your heart will compute the sum total of all earth's joys and say, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." To a citizen of heaven this world is "a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." If it be so at its best, what is it at its worst? If its pillows of down cannot rest us, what shall we say of its thorns and briars? If its flood tide cannot bear us up, what shall we say of its neap and its ebb, when mire and dirt succeed a glassy sea? Ah, truly, best or worst, it is well for us to look above the world, and to fix our heart where our treasure is preserved, even in heaven.

But, dear brethren, we could bear up with this present state, and be well satisfied with it, if that were our only difficulty; but far more grievous is the fact that *we carry an evil within us which would cause drought in Paradise itself if it could come there.* The Christian gets into a land of drought because his own nature is dry; he finds a barren soil without because he has a barren heart within. Verily there is no doctrine more true to experience than this, that corruption remaineth even in the hearts of the regenerate, and that when we would do good evil is present with us. Within us there is still a carnal mind which is not reconciled to God, neither, indeed, can be; and, as long as we have this about us, if it be permitted for a moment to get the upper hand (and who among us is so watchful that this will never happen), it is no wonder that the joys of grace seem to disappear, and we find ourselves in a spiritual wilderness. We carry about with us enough evil to make another hell, if the infernal pit were filled and its fires extinguished. "Oh, wretched man that I am," said the apostle Paul, "who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He said this, not because he was not a saint, but because he was so far advanced in the way of holiness. The more saintly a saint becomes, the more will he loathe and mourn over the remains of indwelling sin which he finds in his nature, and this will set him longing and thirsting after more grace. When our old unbelief begins to wither our faith, when our natural indifference commences to dry up our life, when our doubts parch the pastures of our hope, and our sins drain the wells of our consolation, it is little wonder if we come into a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.

We may, dear friends, have been so unwatchful as to have brought ourselves into this condition by actual faults of life and conduct. I would make it a matter of personal enquiry among you by asking thoughtful answers to a few questions. Have you restrained prayer? Do you wonder that the land grows dry? Has the word of God been neglected? Have you left off its study of late through pressure of other concerns? Do you wonder if you have left the streams that your soul thirsts? Have you been over much engaged in hunting after temporal gain, and has the hot simoom of worldliness parched your heart? Has there been

anything about your spiritual life that has grieved the Holy Spirit? Have you been idle as a Christian? Have you been content to eat the fat and drink the sweet, and to do nothing to win souls? Or have you while you have fed upon the word of God taken the sweet things of the gospel as a matter of course, and not blessed the Lord for them? Has there been a lack of humility or a deficiency of gratitude? If so, can you wonder that you are in a dry and thirsty land? Have you been careless in your walk? In domestic life has sin been permitted in the family? Have you been winking at evil in your children? Have you permitted it in yourself? If so, remember it is written, "He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and water springs into dry ground, a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein." You may have fallen into a parched condition of spirit because you have forgotten him of whom in happier days you sang, "All my fresh springs are in thee." Because you have walked contrary to God, God is walking contrary to you; and it is your duty to repent and return at once to your Lord; only by so doing will peace return unto you.

If these various things do not account for the believer being in a dry and thirsty land there are still some other reasons which I will briefly mention. Sometimes Christians become very hungry and thirsty when they are *banished from the means of grace*. Poor as our ministry may be, yet there are many of God's children who would miss it more than their daily food if it were taken from them. God's servants whom he calls to the work of the ministry are bound to think little of themselves, and yet the loaves and fishes which they distribute to the multitude are by no means to be lightly esteemed—the people would faint by the way if they had them not. It is a severe trial to some saints to be kept away from sanctuary privileges. I know that, when you travel for pleasure or roam by the seaside for health, if you go to a place of worship on the Sabbath and find no spiritual bread, you fall into a miserable state of mind, and sigh to spend your Sabbaths where the children's portion is dealt out liberally, and all the servants have bread enough and to spare. David loved the very doors of the Lord's house; he thirsted and pined because he was shut out from sanctuary privileges, and it was especially for that reason that he speaks of himself as being in a "dry and thirsty land, where no water is."

The same may happen when we are *denied the sweets of Christian intercourse*. David had poor company when he was in the wilderness in the days of Saul; his friends were not much better than freebooters and runaways, whom he would never have selected as friends had not the necessities of his own condition and of the political situation rendered it necessary that he should become a captain over them. They were a strange band of men, made up chiefly of those who were in debt and discontented, the rebellious against Saul's wretched administration, men of broken fortunes and suspected loyalty. Few of them were fit friends for the man after God's own heart. I do not wonder that he looked even at the sons of Zeruiah who loved him best, and were his own kinsmen, and felt that as for holy intercourse his soul was in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. Believers are to keep out of worldly company, and yet it sometimes happens that providence throws the child of God among the ungodly, like Obadiah in the family of Ahab,

Nehemiah in the palace of Artaxerxes, and Daniel in the court of Darius. Your lot is hard if you are called to dwell among worldlings, for they have power to injure your piety but they cannot help you. You look around upon a score of hard faces all eager after the almighty dollar, and none of them caring for the almighty God, and I do not wonder that you feel yourself to be in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. We owe much more to Christian friends than we think, and especially the younger folk among us do well to value Christian associations, and to be much in the company of them that fear the Lord, and that think upon his name. If they are denied this refreshment they will find life to be a dry land, where no water is.

Yes, but the like may happen from other causes as well. Sometimes a believing man may be *treated with gross injustice and endure much hardship as the result*. David was blameless, and yet Saul hunted him as a traitor; he was upright, yet his people revolted from him. It tends to make a good man sour in spirit to be misrepresented and treated as guilty, when he knows that he is innocent, and this bitterness is very apt to put away from us many sources of comfort, and leave us uncomfortable. Then many a spring becomes dry, and the heart shrivels as under a burning sun.

Sometimes, too, *domestic conditions may be so changed that we cannot feel as we would wish*. I do not know how you feel, but I think many must acknowledge that when they get away from their own room and from their regular habits, they are not always able to commune with God as usual. One likes to read from the very same Bible, and to kneel at the very same chair. When the time comes for meeting with God, you are, perhaps, roaming up and down amid the choicest scenery, and though you are reverent and adoring, yet you find it hard to reach the sweetness of fellowship with God which you have been accustomed to enjoy at home. Everything may be very lovely around you while you are tourists; everything may be attractive and delightful, and yet I should not wonder but what you will find it to be a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. I can well conceive that your hearts long for an hour of your accustomed quietude and familiarity with God; you would give anything to be back in the little room, looking out upon the hills, or to have an hour in that secluded little garden, where you have been accustomed to take your pocket Testament and sit down and hear the voice of Jesus speaking to your soul, and to speak to him in return. Even hours and places have much to do with our heart's condition. I know not how it is, but such strange creatures are we, that in one place we cannot worship as we were wont to do in another; and therefore the soul finds its condition to be that of a wanderer in a dry and thirsty land.

Then, too, *much depends upon health and physical conditions*. In some forms of sickness the soul is apt to be grievously depressed and cast out of its proper condition. Some of you may remember the venerable Watts Wilkinson, the Golden Lecturer. I was reading his life the other day, and he tells us that after many years of health he suffered a season of sickness, and he learned by experience that sickness is not the best time, as he had formerly thought it was, for drawing near to God. The effects of sickness are often very beneficial under the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, but they are seldom so *at the time*. It is

"afterwards" that these things work the fruits of righteousness, but at the time it is often with us as it was with Wilkinson, who says that he never in his life felt so dull in prayer and so heavy in reading the Scriptures as during his illness. I believe that often the condition of the body operates upon the condition of the mind, and that our being in a dry and thirsty land where no water is may be occasioned by a feverishness, or a feebleness of the flesh. Want of faith may sometimes be little other than a want of natural cheerfulness, and we may mistake infirmity for iniquity. We have our times of natural sadness; we have, too, our times of depression, when we cannot do otherwise than hang our heads. Seasons of lethargy will also befall us from changes in our natural frame, or from weariness, or the rebound of over excitement. The trees are not always green, the sap sleeps in them in the winter; and we have winters too. Life cannot always be at flood tide: the fulness of the blessing is not upon the most gracious at all times. We may always burn, but we cannot always flame; we may always grow, but we cannot always flower; and if we always bear fruit, yet is not the fruit always ripe, nor does the ripeness always wear the same delicate bloom. Till we are perfected we shall not be always at our highest point, else were earth turned to heaven, and time had forgotten itself, and merged its variableness in the immutability of eternity. So you see there are many reasons why the best of saints are sometimes in a dry and thirsty land where no water is.

II. The second head is a very short but very comforting one, that **GOD IS THEIR GOD STILL**—"O God, thou art my God." Yes, he is just as much our God in the dry land as if we sat by Siloa's softly flowing brook, which glides by the oracle of God. O God, thou art my God, when I see the fountain leaping from the rock in a cascade of cool refreshment, and thou art just as much my God if every river bed be turned to a heap of stones, and the burning sand on all sides mock my searching eye. The Lord belongs to us by an eternal charter, which will never lose its force; for the Scripture saith, "this God is our God for ever and ever." This is a very sweet and precious truth, and should be remembered evermore. Of course, when a man falls into a dull dry state of soul, he may very well question his condition before God, and he ought not to rest till the question is satisfactorily answered; but where there is living faith the fact is certain, and all question may be dismissed. God is your God still, my dear brother, whatever condition you are in, if you can now come and grasp him by faith, and call him yours with the voice of love. Can you join me in words like these? Lord, I have lost my comforts, I have lost my assurances, I have lost my delights; but still I trust in thee. I have no God but thee, neither will I worship any other, nor repose my confidence elsewhere. Though thou slay me yet will I trust in thee. The wounds of Jesus for my sin are still my soul's one hope; the precious blood of thy dear Son is my sole confidence. If such be your language you have not lost your God; all the other things you speak of may have gone for a while, but as long as you can still say, "O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee," thou art still amongst the living in Zion, and thy time to rejoice shall soon come. Just think a minute: it is not possible that God's love to his people should change with their condition; such a

theology would represent God as very variable in his love; yea, it would do worse than that, for it would make the gospel into a law, and turn all evangelical truth into legality. Does God love me because I love him? Does God love me because I am bright and happy? Does God love me because my faith is strong, and because I can leap like a hart in his ways? Why, then, he must have loved me because of something good in me, and that is not according to the gospel. The gospel represents the Lord as loving the unworthy and justifying the ungodly, and therefore I must cast out of my mind the idea that divine love depends on human conditions. Can it be true that God only loves his children when they are in good spiritual health? Is it so with me? Do I love my child when he is strong, and hate him when he sickens! When I see the spots of disease upon him do I put him away and say that he is no son of mine? If his poor eyes should fail him and he should become blind, should I cast him off? If his feet should fail him and he became a helpless cripple, should I disown him? If he lost his hearing and could not listen to my voice, would I discard him? Fathers, mothers, I speak to you; come what may to your offspring, are they not yours still? and would you not love them still? Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? The Lord hath said, "they may forget, yet will he not forget his people." Be cheered, then, for into whatsoever state of unhappiness we may have wandered, the love of God does not depend upon our condition; it knows no ups nor downs, nor winters nor summers, nor ebbs nor flows, but abides for ever sure. Even though the Lord should hide his face from us, he is our God still; for the Lord hath taught us to cry, "My God, my God," even when we have to add, "why hast thou forsaken me?"

When the Lord first loved us we were in a worse state than we are in now, for though we feel dry and sapless we are not utterly dead as we were then. Remember "his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins." We were enemies, and yet he reconciled us, and we are not enemies now, though we fear we are poor, cold-hearted friends. We are sadly sick, perhaps, but we are not actually under condemnation as we were when first of all his sovereign grace came forth to do the deed of redemption and deliver us from the wrath to come; and if the Lord loved us then why should he not love us now?

We have not fallen into any state which takes the Lord by surprise, for he knew well enough what we should be. However we may blame ourselves, and I hope we do blame ourselves severely for every evil within our hearts, yet he foreknew what we should be, and is by no means disappointed in us. There has nothing happened which our God did not foreknow, and if he chose us knowing all this, can it be possible that when it comes to pass he should turn from his purpose and change his mind? No, never.

Brethren, we have had great experience, some of us, of God's love in the past, and this makes us feel that he can help us, and will help us in the present. In the sanctuary we have seen his power and his glory. Oh the delight, the heavenly joys which we have known at times in his service. At prayer meetings I know we have had our hearts warmed within us, and felt that we could scarcely be happier in heaven. Sometimes under a sermon we have been fired as with new life, and we have

felt that we could begin again with double strength. If this has happened to us in former times, when we were heavy and depressed, why can it not happen again? Doth not the Lord delight to revive the spirits of the faint and weary? Angels' visits may be few and far between, but not the visitations of the Spirit of God, for he dwelleth with us and in us for ever. Or ever we are aware he can make us like the chariots of Amminadib, for he has done it, and what he has done he is certainly able to do again. Wherefore comfort yourselves with these thoughts.

Besides, if we be in the wilderness, is not God the God of the wilderness? Were not his greatest marvels wrought when he led his people about through the howling wilderness, and fed them with manna, and revealed himself in a fiery, clondy pillar? Where did Hagar look to him who saw her but in the wilderness? Where did Moses see the Lord in the bush, but at the backside of the desert? Where did Elias hear a voice speaking to him, but away there in the wilderness; and where did David, the Psalmist, meet with his God, but in the lone, solitary land, where no water is? O my soul, if thou art in the desert now, expect thy God to meet with thee. Open now thine eyes and expect to see him display his grace; now that thou art as the dry ground, he will pour floods upon thee; now that thou art empty, he will fill thee with his divine fulness. Thy poverty prepares thee to apprehend his riches; thine inward death prepares thee to receive his everlasting life; therefore, have hope and rise from thy depression and fear.

III. Thus much upon the second subject, by which we are led briefly to the third, namely, WHEN WE ARE IN A DRY AND THIRSTY LAND OUR WISEST COURSE IS TO CRY TO HIM AT ONCE. Now, brethren and sisters, I want to speak very practically to you, as I do to myself, for many of us are deeply and personally concerned in this matter. Very likely the warmth of the atmosphere on this warm summer morning may make you feel all the duller in devotion; you may not be enjoying the things of God, because the air is heavy and invites to slumber; let us then bestir ourselves and break the bonds of sleep asunder. We can only do this by crying at once to God himself. Let us go straight away to Jesus, our friend and physician, and let us cry, "O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee. My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee." Observe, that he does not first pray for deliverance from the dry and thirsty land, and then say, there I will go and seek God; but no, in the desert itself he cries, "My soul thirsteth for thee." Learn from this, and do not say, "I will get into communion with God when I feel better," but long for communion now. It is one of the temptations of the devil to tell you not to pray when you do not feel like praying. Pray twice as much then. When you feel least like praying, then pray the more, for you need it the more; and when you feel very little like coming near to God, then cry, "My God, I must be in a terrible state, or else I should have a greater longing after thee. Therefore will I not rest till I find thee out and come to thee." Do not, any of you, practise the sinner's folly; he declares that he will tarry till he is better, and then he never comes at all. No, you children of God must not say, "We will seek the Lord when we are better;" but you must seek him at once. Practise the gospel principle of "Just as I am"; and come to Jesus just as you are. Lethargic, half asleep, almost dead in spirit, yet nevertheless come to Jesus. Make a

plunge for it. Say, "I must have a sense of his love, and I must have it now. I must not lose this blessed Sabbath morning. I must enter into fellowship with God." Make a dash for it, and you shall have it. Do not wait till you are delivered, but in the dry and thirsty land sigh after God.

Neither, dear friends, pray so much for ordinances as for the Lord himself. You see David does not say, "O God, thou art my God, I will seek the sanctuary. My soul thirsts for a prayer-meeting, my flesh longs for a sermon." No, he sighs for *God*, he thirsts alone for God. I do believe that our Lord sometimes strikes all ordinances dry to make us feel that they are nothing without himself. The means of grace are blessed breasts at which the soul may suck when God is in them, but they are emptiness itself when he is not there. The preacher who has best fed you will only disappoint you if his Lord be not with him, or if you are not prepared to look beyond the man to the Master. The Lord loves to furnish his people of all earthly bread and water, to bring them to wait upon himself alone. I charge you, beloved, this morning, whatever your state may be, make a direct appeal to the Lord that he would immediately give you himself by Christ Jesus. Nothing less than ~~this~~ can meet your needs, and this will meet your case, though all outward ordinances should be denied. What if no point of the sermon should impress or quicken you, yet can the silent power of the Spirit of God glide into your heart, and become life to your soul. Seek it, then, and seek it believing that it may be had, and had at once. The child of God may rise at once from slumber into earnestness, and may leap from lethargy into zeal. It is wonderful how speedily the Spirit of God works; he wants not hours and days and weeks in which to make us young again; he worketh with singular mastery over the lapse of time, and perfecteth in an instant his good work. It was darkness all, primeval darkness, thick and black as ebony itself, and Jehovah said, "Light be!" Then flashed the day, and all was brightness. So may it be black as hell with you at this moment, and an infernal night may brood over every faculty of your being, yet if the enlightening Spirit come forth day shall dawn, a day that shall surprise you, a day above the brightness of that which cometh of the sun.

Do not be afraid, dear children of God, you that have fallen into a mournful state, do not be afraid to cry out to God in the language of the psalmist this morning. I know we sometimes feel as if we must not and dare not pray. We have become so dull, so lifeless, so unworthy, that we do not expect to be heard, and feel as if it would be presumption to cry. But our heavenly Father loves to hear his children cry all day long. Rutherford says, "the bairn in Christ's house that is most troublesome is the most welcome. He that makes the most din for his meat is the best bairn that Christ has." You may not quite agree with that as to your own children, but it is certainly so with our Lord. Rutherford says, "It is a good child that is always whining each hour of the day for a piece and a drink." He speaks of a hungry soul hanging around Christ's pantry door, and commends him for so doing. Assuredly the Lord wishes his children to have strong desires after himself. Desire, then, and let those desires be vehement. If you can cry out to Jesus, he will joyfully hear you: if you will give him no rest, he

will give you all the rest you need. The Lord finds music in his children's cries. "Oh," say you, "I would cry, but mine is such a discordant and foolish cry." You are the very man to cry, for your sorrow will put an emphasis into your voice. Of all the cries your children utter that comes closest home to you which arises out of their pain and deep distress. A dying moan from a little one will pierce a mother's heart. See, she presses the babe to her bosom! She cries, "My dear dying child," and weeps over it. Thou too shalt be pressed to the bosom of everlasting love if thou canst only groan, or sob, or sigh.

Only be thou careful that thou be not happy in a dry and thirsty land; be careful that thou be not content away from God, for if thou wilt not rest till thou get at him thou shalt soon have him; if thou wilt groan after him thou shalt find him. A sigh will fetch him. May there be much longing, panting, and pleading among us at this hour.

Do not let anyone here be satisfied to remain in a dull state. Do not say, "Well, but he says a child of God may get there." Yes, I know I did; but I did not bid you fall into it, above all, I did not tell you to abide in it. One of your children may fall and cut his knees, but I should not recommend all his brothers to try a tumble, nor should I exhort him to lie on the ground. The dry and thirsty land is really a dry and thirsty land to the believer, but if you can be satisfied to dwell there it is not a dry and thirsty land to you. Now, child of God, if you have fallen into a dull state, I beseech you now to labour to rise out of it; and I do this first because you are not a fit person to be in such a state. Yours is the land that floweth with milk and honey; you are like David, driven out of Canaan for a time, but you must never be satisfied till you get back to Jerusalem. Oh, cry unto the Lord to bring you back that you may see the king's face and sit at the king's table, and delight yourself with the marrow and the fatness which you ought to feed upon every day. You are a king and a priest unto God; will you go about in sordid beggar's rags and forget your dignity and sit on a dunghill with the paupers of this miserable world? No, come away, come away; the dry and thirsty land is not for you, but the land of plenty and of joy. Think of your obligations to your Saviour. You have been bought with his precious blood, your sins are forgiven you, you are a joint-heir with him, are you going to be cold and careless towards the Well-beloved of your soul? I was about to say three-fourths of all the Christian people in this world live in such a way as rather to disgrace the Redeemer than to honour him. I have not said that, but if I had chanced to make the statement I would not retract it, for I am afraid it is true. I am afraid that many of us are no credit to Christ. If worldlings look at us they say, "Is that a Christian?" If my Lord were to send some of his sheep to a show, they would be far enough from winning a prize. If the prize were for joyous piety some would fail utterly; if the prize were for consistent courage and strength of heart, how few of us would be "highly commended." Many of his sheep are no credit to their feeder, and reflect no honour upon their Shepherd.

Out of your dumps, my brethren! Why should you be sitting in ~~larkness~~ any longer with such grace to be had, and such a Saviour to give it. Bethink you, you are losing a world of joy! You are sitting

like an owl in a haunted ruin, blinking your eyes, when you might be flying like an eagle straight up to the Sun of righteousness, in full communion with the great Lord of day. Why are you down there, in the dens and caves of the earth, among the dragons howling away, when you might be up there among the cherubim and seraphim magnifying the Lord, for "He hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus"? I said you were children of God, and therefore I am not condemning you, but I would brush you up if I could, and bestir you to walk somewhat more worthily of the obligations imposed upon you by the grace of God.

Think, my dear brothers and sisters, if you and I all get into a dull, sleepy state, what is to become of this poor world. You have to go to your class this afternoon, are you going there half awake and half asleep? Are you going to dream among your children all the afternoon? "Oh," say you, "we do not do that." Do not you? Why, many a preacher is not above half awake when he delivers his sermon, and rather snores it than preaches it. Few of us ever were awake all through. We are awake half way. Oh that we were thoroughly awake, thoroughly alive, thoroughly in earnest. No wonder that sinners are given to slumber when saints sleep as they do. No wonder that the unconverted think hell a fiction when we live as if it were so. No wonder that they imagine heaven to be a romance, when we act as if it were so little a reality. Oh Lord, awake us, even if it be by thunder claps! Oh God, for Jesus Christ's sake, bring us out of the dry and thirsty land. Hast thou not said that if we drink of the river of the water of life out of our belly shall flow rivers of living water, that we shall neither complain of thirst ourselves nor shall there remain in a desert around us? Help us, then, to drink abundantly.

I have thus spoken to as many as believe in Jesus Christ, but to you that are unbelievers much of this may equally well apply, for you too are in a land more dry and thirsty still. Do not go about to sacraments and sermons, much less to priests, but go straight to God in Christ Jesus. Cry to him! O sinner, cry to him, "O God, though thou be not my God, yet still early will I seek thee. My heart longeth for thee, come to me and save me." Jesus will come to you and save you, even you, to the praise of the glory of his grace. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm lxi.;
Isaiah xxxv.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—136, 63 (Song III.), 758.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE TRUE POSITION OF THE WITNESS WITHIN.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 11TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

“He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.”—1 John v. 10.

SOME time ago I tried to set forth the manner of the witness and sealing of the Spirit, and I have no doubt that the subject will still remain upon the memory of many of you; but I am led to refer to it again, and to go over the same ground again, because I meet with so many instances in which mistakes are made in reference to it,—mistakes which cause great sorrow and much sin. The letter which I will now read I received yesterday, and it is one of many of the same import. “Dear Mr. Spurgeon,—May I ask your prayers, and the prayers of your congregation, to God, that he will, by the Holy Spirit, reveal himself unto me. I have for a long time past, I may say years, been trying to serve him, and have a strong desire openly to join with his people; but I have not the witness in myself that I am saved, and until then I dare not take the step.” Now, this letter breathes an anxious desire to be right and sincere in all things, and this is to be highly commended. We ought to be jealous over our spirit, fearful of hypocrisy, and resolved to do all things in truth and sincerity. We ought to abhor the idea of making a profession of that which is not true, and so far this letter shows a spirit worthy of imitation. Everyone should be anxious that he should in nothing be a hypocrite, and should not allow the profession of his lips to go one single inch beyond the feeling of his heart. It is, again, a most proper thing that every man should desire to have the very best possible evidence as to his soul's salvation, and if there be an evidence to be had of a very special, decisive, and certain kind it is but right that every man should cry to God for it, and should feel unsatisfied until he obtains it.

Yet, when all this has been said, we are bound in honesty to add that it is very possible for this anxiety to become an obstacle to faith, and for the desire after special evidence to become a hindrance to

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our receiving the evidence which the Lord has given us in his word. In our ignorance we may be overlooking the true source of peace and assurance; while straining our eye-balls by looking for that which God will never reveal to us, we may be missing rare consolations which lie near at hand. While craving for something unusual we may be neglecting that which infinite wisdom has put within our reach, like the foolish child which utters hungry cries for the moon, but forgets to eat the bread upon its own plate. There be many who in their sincerely earnest desires to gain some token for good are forgetting that earnest of the Spirit which is already within their own bosoms, and thus, through darkness of spirit, they miss present comforts, and are too feeble for present duties. They sit in fetters forged by their own fancy, when they might as well arise and walk at large. May the Holy Spirit, therefore, instruct us so to handle this matter that many who are seeking for this inner witness may know that they have it already, or may at least obtain it this day through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Here, then, is our text—"He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself."

I. Our first observation is that BELIEVING ON THE SON OF GOD COMES BEFORE THE INNER WITNESS. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself"; he believes before he has that witness, and it is only as a believer that he obtains it. This is self-evident in the text. No one can read these words without seeing that a man must be a believer before he has the witness in himself. It does not say, "he who has the witness in himself becomes a believer," but the order is reversed—"He that believeth hath the witness in himself." He believes first, and then he obtains the inner witness.

The basis of faith is the testimony of God concerning his Son—the testimony of God as we find it in holy Scripture. I do not believe Christ Jesus to be the Son of God because of anything I feel within myself, but because God himself declares him to be such; neither do I trust my soul with Jesus because of certain emotions felt within, but because God, in the book which I accept as his testimony, declares that he has set forth Jesus to be the propitiation for sin. In the Bible I see that God himself witnesses that whosoever trusts Jesus is thereby forgiven, accepted, and saved, and therefore I trust him. We have no other foundation for our faith to rest upon than the witness of God. "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater." The testimony of God is surely enough for us. Dare we ask more? We must not go about to buttress the solid pillar of divine testimony. "Thus saith the Lord" is proof enough, and it is blasphemous impertinence for us to demand further evidence. Dare we look around for something which we have observed or something which we have felt to be a support to the solemn declaration of the Most High? If so, we are not believing in God at all, but are waiting for a surer witness than God, who cannot lie. In such a case we are still lost, for we cannot be saved while we are giving God the lie by refusing to believe him till he can bring corroborative evidence. If we were to obtain that additional evidence it is clear that our faith would not then stand in God, but in the additional testimony, and so we should remain as to God unbelievers still. The only basis for saving faith is the testimony of God himself

concerning his Son Jesus Christ, "and this is the testimony that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son."

Note that the words which follow our text assure us very solemnly that *the rejection of this basis, namely, God's own testimony, involves the utmost possible guilt.* "He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record which God gave of his Son." Now, it is quite clear that this does not refer to any inward witness, because the man who does not believe Christ has no inward witness, and cannot have any. He cannot be guilty of rejecting what he never had; but God has given an outward witness to all mankind, a witness contained in Holy Scripture, clear and express, and therein he declareth that Jesus Christ is his Son and the appointed Saviour of men, and he bids men trust in him, promising that they shall thus be saved. It is the rejection of the revelation of God which involves the unbeliever in transcendent guilt, because his unbelief is tantamount to saying that God speaketh lies, that he hath deliberately given us a book which is a fiction, that he hath set before us hopes which will end in disappointment, that he has threatened us with a doom which is a mere bugbear, that he has sent us a Saviour who cannot save, who has presented a sacrifice in which there is no real efficacy. The rejection of Christ as our Saviour is the most pointed way of giving to the Lord the lie direct. Surely we ought to start back from such guilt as this, for it stabs at God's honour, and inasmuch as it impugns his truthfulness it robs him of one of the brightest jewels of his crown. O beloved hearers, be not guilty of this, I pray you, but believe your God. What if all men contradict him—be it yours to believe him: "let God be true and every man a liar." Believe God, though every feeling of your nature should seem to controvert his testimony, for feelings deceive, and consciousness may be a dream, but God cannot lie—his word is truth itself. This, then, is the basis of faith, and the basis of faith which cannot be rejected without the utmost sin.

Let me put it in another shape. I hear and I read that God has sent his Son Jesus Christ to save sinners: and thus I learn that I must trust Christ, and I shall then obtain the benefit of his salvation. I believe this; I trust Christ, and I am saved. This salvation gives me peace and rest, and I become confirmed in my belief. Now there are many who want this peace and rest before they will believe. They expect harvest before sowing, and will not sow unless their preposterous desire can be granted. My dear friend, you cannot expect to have the natural order reversed in this fashion. Why should you want it? Hath not God spoken the truth, and if it be the truth why do you not believe it? The essence of faith lies in believing that God speaketh the truth, and in acting upon his word because it is the truth. Is this more than God has a right to expect of you? Why should there be any refusal to render what is so manifestly his due? Why should we ask for further evidence whether it be in ourselves or in others? Should we not at once say, "God has said it: it is true: I will act upon it: and since he saith Christ died for sinners, and saveth all that trust in him, I will trust him, and I shall be saved"?

Now, *this basis of faith is abundantly sufficient.* I feel half ashamed to have to insist upon this most evident truth, for, if we were not desperately set on mischief and alienated from God, we should feel this at

once. Hath God said it? Then to ask any confirmation of it is a direct insult to him, a gratuitous impertinence against the majesty of heaven. Hath God said it? Then we are more bound to believe than if all the scientific men in the world for centuries had witnessed to it. Hath God said it? We are more sure of it than if all the traditions of all nations had handed it down to us. Hath God said it? Then we are surer of it than if our reason proved it by mathematical demonstration. Hath God said it? Then we are more certain of it than if we saw it with our eyes, for they might be deceived, or than if we heard it with our ears, for they might be imposed upon. Our senses are deceivable, but God is not deceivable; he must be true: and we may wisely cast the weight of our souls upon his faithfulness, and take all the consequences, fully assured that what the Lord hath promised he is able also to perform.

Now, though this basis is sufficient, the Lord, knowing our unbelief, has been pleased not to add to it, but to *set it before us in a graciously amplified manner*. He says, "There are three which bear witness in earth, the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and these three agree in one." That Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he can and does save sinners, and that he will save all who believe in him, is proved first by the giving of *the Holy Spirit*. He descended first at Pentecost, visibly and perceptibly, in rushing wind and cloven tongues of fire, and he manifested his power by the marvellous gift of speaking in languages which the disciples had never learned. The Holy Spirit was mightily with the apostles, bearing witness that Jesus was the Son of God, and that the gospel which they preached was divine. The Holy Ghost has not returned to heaven, and though his miraculous power is no longer seen among us in the physical world, he is still working spiritual miracles in the church; he still regenerates, he still enlightens, he still consoles, he is still the help of our infirmity in prayer, he is still our comforter and guide. In many blessed and useful ways, for which he is to be adored, the Holy Spirit is still in the midst of the church to witness to the truth of the gospel. Instead of miracles we have the presence of the Holy Ghost: men quickened from death in sin, hearts renewed, eyes enlightened, souls regenerated—these are the standing witnesses of God in the church to the truth of the gospel.

Then, there is the witness of *the water*. By the water I understand to be meant that living water whereof if a man drink he shall live for ever, and it indicates the spiritual life which abides in the church,—the life and the cleansing which God gives to believers. Now, there are thousands of us who can bear witness that we possess a life to which we once were strangers; but by believing in Jesus Christ that life has been given to us, as it shall also be given to all who hear me this day, upon their believing in Jesus. That water of life abiding in the church, and ever flowing out of the very midst of her living members, is another form of the witness of God, a part of the one solid basis upon which true faith must rest.

Then there is *the blood*—a third witness—that blood of atonement which speaks better things than that of Abel, which brings peace to the guilty conscience, and ends the strife within. There is no voice like it to believing ears. This is another and most powerful form of the witness

of God. He does pardon sin and give peace to the conscience—the fact is known to thousands, and is the abiding witness of God to his dear Son. The abiding power of the Spirit, the water, and the blood are God's continuance of his one testimony that Jesus Christ is the appointed Saviour, and that whosoever trusteth in him shall be saved. Beyond this evidence the hearer of the gospel may expect nothing. What more can he need? What more can he desire? If you refuse Christ upon the witness of God, you must refuse him outright, for other witness shall never be given unto those who believe not upon the solemn testimony of God.

And, beloved, let me say that this basis which has been so graciously amplified in the triple witness of the Spirit, the water, and the blood, has this to commend it, that *it is everlasting and immutable*. Did you believe in Jesus Christ fifty years ago? Did you then trust him because God declared him to be worthy of your confidence? That witness of God remains in all its potency to-day. A thousand years ago a poor sinner came to Jesus because God had assured him in the Scriptures that there he should find mercy, and to-day another sinner may come with just the same confidence, for the warrant of faith is unaltered. What a blessing is this! Our feelings change; sometimes the inward witness burns brightly, and sometimes it becomes very dim; sometimes we feel tender in heart, and at another time we are hard as a mill-stone; at one moment we are zealous, and at another moment indifferent. It would never do to have such a shifting basis of our faith. Such a moving, shivering quicksand as this would never satisfy us long together. But what a rock we have in God's word. He hath said it and it must be true, "He that hath the Son hath life." When I look within I cannot always tell by my feelings whether I have obtained spiritual life or not; but since I know that I believe in Jesus I know that I have eternal life, because God has said so. I, trusting his Son Jesus Christ, know myself to be saved over the head of all my feelings, let them be what they may, for God hath said, "He that believeth hath everlasting life." And you, poor soul, are not invited to come to Christ this morning because there is something in you that is a warrant for your coming, some inward witness bearing testimony to your fitness; but you are to come because there is witness enough in this book, witness enough in the fact that the Spirit of God is in the church, that the living water is still imparted unto men, and that the blood of Jesus hath not lost its power, but cleanseth from all sin. If you will not believe upon this all-sufficient witness you cannot expect to receive any other, for this is the witness of God upon which men savingly believe in Christ Jesus.

Now, dear friends, *the faith which will not and cannot rest on this basis is evidently no faith in God at all*, but a proud resolve to demand other evidence than his word. "Well," saith one, "but suppose I were to see a vision, I should then believe." That is to say, you would believe your vision, but that vision would, in all probability, be the result of a fevered brain, and you would be deceived. "Oh, but if I could hear a voice, then I could believe." That is to say, you refuse the sure word of testimony in the Bible, and will only believe God if he will condescend to indulge your whims. Voices which you might think you heard are not to be depended upon, for imagination easily creates them. When day-dreaming I have heard many voices, or thought I did, but

they may have been echoes, or birds far up in the air, or mere fancies. There is nothing to be depended upon in hearing a voice in the air. Will you put that in competition with the revealed will of God? "Oh, but if I had a special revelation." Such a special revelation you have no right to look for. I speak most plainly here, no additional revelation is to be expected, because the book of God is ended, the revelation of God is finished, and he that adds to the sacred book is cursed. If you, therefore, say that God has made a new revelation to you, you run a dreadful risk of the curses which are written in this book. God, by his Spirit, brings old truth home to the heart, gives new light to our eyes, and causes the word to exercise new power over us, but he reveals no new facts, and he utters no words in any man's ears concerning his condition and state. We must be content with the old revelation and with the life and power and force with which the Holy Spirit brings it to the heart. Neither must any of us seek to have any additional revelation, for that would imply that the Scriptures are incomplete. What, has God spoken all this volume that you may believe on his Son, and is not that enough for you? Must he go out of his way to make some private communication to you? Is all that which he has already spoken to be treated as a lie, unless he at your dictation condescends to say somewhat for your personal behoof? Are you too good or too great to be saved like other sinners? That is what it practically comes to. "Oh," say you, "but if I felt so and so, I would believe." Suppose you did, then your confidence would be in your feelings, and not in God, and what would that be but presumption, seeing that there cannot be anything in your feelings which can make God true. God is true, feel whatever you may. Believe him, then, for it is to that faith in his Son that he gives salvation, and not to faith in your own feelings. Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness; but if Abraham had stood higgling and haggling till he had seen this and that he would not have believed, nor found righteousness by faith.

Let me tell those of you who will not believe in God till you get a certain experience, or sign, or wonder to be added to God's word, that *those of his people who have been longest walking by faith have to come back full often to the first foundation of faith in the outer witness of God in his Word.* It has been the privilege of some of us to possess the inner witness for years, and yet at certain times it departs, and we have to fall back on the first basement, truth. When the winds are out, and the storms are loosed, and temptation howls through the soul, we always fly to the Word of God and not to our own experience: we get away from what we feel to what the Lord has said. One ounce, of "it is written," gives more confidence than a ton of what we have felt. We are apt in troublous times to judge that our happy feeling was a delusion, and our confidence a mistake. "True, I did think that I stood and looked within the pearly gates, and was full of heavenly joy; but, alas, it may have been all a dream." This is, however, no dream—that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners—there is no mistake about that fact. That God has set forth his Son to be a propitiation for sin—there is no imagination about that. There it stands in black and white in the Scriptures of truth, and to that witness we fly again. Whether I am saint or sinner, whether I am an heir of heaven or an heir of wrath, there

standeth the word, "He that believeth in him is not condemned." I do believe in him, and I am not condemned, nor shall all the devils in hell make me think I am, since God has said I am not. On that rock my faith shall stand unshaken, come what may.

Let this suffice upon our first head, that believing on the Son comes before the inner witness.

II. Secondly, THE INNER WITNESS NATURALLY FOLLOWS UPON FAITH. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself." *It is quite impossible that the inner witness should precede faith*, and this you will clearly see if you think a minute. Here is a medicine well known to be exceedingly efficacious in a certain disease. A sick man says that he will not believe in its power until he has some inner witness of it. It is clear to you that he cannot possibly have any evidence of its power upon him till he has at least enough faith to take the medicine, and give it a chance of operating upon him. So is it with this blessed *catholicon* of the precious blood of Jesus: you cannot have any *inner* witness to its power till first of all you receive it by faith. "To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to as many as believed on his name"; but the reception must come first. And you cannot have this witness apart from faith, because the Holy Ghost never sets his seal to a blank sheet of paper. There must first of all be the writing of faith upon the heart, and then the Spirit of God puts his attesting seal thereto. Would you have God the Holy Ghost witness to a falsehood? And yet it would be witnessing to a lie if he gave an inner witness of salvation to a man who is still an unbeliever, and who consequently is condemned already. If you refuse to believe God's word how can you think that the Spirit will bear witness of anything in you except it be to your condemnation? There must be faith going before, and then the witness will follow after.

But be it remembered especially that *a man may have the witness within him and sometimes he may not perceive it*. Say you, "That is strange"? Yet reflect; you might be the possessor of a large estate, and an adversary might contest your right to it, and you might not be able to find your title deeds; the estate might be yours clearly enough, but those deeds of yours might be mislaid and locked up in a forgotten drawer, and you might be sorely put to it, perhaps, until the day of trial settled the dispute as to whether it is yours or not. I believe that many a child of God has plenty of witness in his own soul, but he has not the wisdom to perceive it; plenty of witness, but through ignorance or carelessness he does not collect it and refresh himself with it. If he believes he has the witness within himself, and he will be comforted if he has but light enough to know what the witness is, but often through negligence in searching the word of God he has the witness, but cannot discover it. He wishes to read it, but his ignorance has mislaid it.

Now, what is this witness within? It may be seen as follows: take the verses that precede my text, and you get one form of it. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and the Saviour of sinners—that is the main point to be witnessed. First *the Spirit*, after we have believed, bears witness in our soul that it is so, because we perceive that the Spirit has led us to believe in Jesus, and has given us repentance; the Spirit has

renewed us, the Spirit has made us different from what we were, the Spirit helps us in prayer, the Spirit lifts us up upon the wings of praise, the Spirit works upon us wondrously, and so we gather that this comes to us through believing in Jesus; he is indeed the Saviour of sinners, for we are saved. Then *the water* bears witness within us—that is to say, we feel a new life, we feel the living water in our hearts, and we are conscious of being alive to things to which we were once dead. We find that now there is within us a new nature, which we never possessed before. All this becomes comfortable evidence that what we have believed is true; we have proved it to be true, for we have the life which was promised to us upon our believing in Jesus. Thirdly, *the precious blood* within our souls bears further witness, for when it gives us peace we sing as sinners bought with blood, and rejoice before God as cleansed by the blood from all sin, and as having access into that which is within the veil by the sprinkled blood, and we feel deep peace within our souls through the voice of the blood. This is a witness sweet and clear within us, proving that what we received upon God's word without any other evidence is certainly true. Now we have confirmatory witness within our spirits, given not because we demanded it, but as a sweet reward and gracious privilege. We should never have received it if we had not believed first on the naked word of God, but after that the witness flows naturally into the heart.

Another part of the witness lies in this, that when we have believed *we receive life, and according to the 11th verse this is the record that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.* We have believed, and we feel that we have obtained the life; and we are doubly assured that the witness of God is true. We believed it before, because God had said it, and now we are permitted to feel it; since the life is welling up within our souls like a fountain, we know now that Jesus Christ must be the Son of God, for to whom else is it given to bestow life? Who else could have bestowed upon us this high, this spiritual, this heavenly life?

In detail, the inward evidence lies very much this way. First, *a wondrous sense of change* comes over the believer. Having believed in Jesus Christ upon the simple evidence of God, there is a work of regeneration performed upon him, and he feels himself altogether transformed. A young girl once said, "Either the whole world is changed, or else I am." Everything seems so altered, for it is seen with new eyes. The man undergoes a radical change of feelings; all things are reversed to him, his sweets are now sour, and his sour is now sweet, and finding himself so thoroughly new-created he says, "This is the finger of God," and he infers that the power which has wrought all this comes from the Son of God.

Then, again, there is a *wondrous power which goes with the word of God*, not always, but yet often. Are you not conscious, my brethren, of often feeling when you are reading the Word, or hearing it, as you never did feel when listening to any other form of speech? Get to the foot of the cross, for instance, and look up, and view the flowing of your Saviour's precious blood; and do you not feel then as nothing else can make you feel? You are reading a religious book, and it has a holy effect upon you; but if you reflect you will see that it is only powerful

because it is borrowed from the word of God. The voice of God thrills your soul in a more than magical manner, as no other voice ever can. Why, I warrant you, a Christian blindfold would know which was a text of Scripture and which was not, by its effect upon his heart. The very words are so majestic that none can imitate their dignity; and when they are applied with power they lay us low or lift us up as only divine words could do. "Where the word of a king is there is power," and this becomes an inner witness to the sovereign truth of the gospel.

The like witness is borne by a sense of being put into our right place. You were all out of place before, but having believed in Jesus Christ you are put in your right position. You stand in harmony with the divine system, and this you feel could only be effected by the truth, for a lie works to disorder and not to right. If anybody had said to the prodigal son: "I doubt whether you have a father; I doubt your father's love; I doubt whether he has any house wherein there is bread enough and to spare," he might have been puzzled to answer those wretched doubts while he was standing at the swine trough, but you could not trouble him with it when he has reached his father's house, and was sitting down at the table of love listening to the sound of the music and dancing, and feasting upon the fatted calf. If any sceptic had then said to him, "There is no father's love," why, his cheeks still sweetly tingling with the kisses would have supplied him with his best reply. I do not suppose he would have deigned to answer the doubter except by a quiet smile, but would have gone on feasting upon the fatted calf; or, if he did answer, he would have said, "Go, take your doubts to one who will receive them; I am right again with my dear father, for he has forgiven me, and I feel his love, and know for myself that he abounds in tenderness."

That *deep feeling of peace* which comes to us through believing in Jesus makes us feel quite sure again that he can save, and that we are secure in him. We took God at his word when we had no feeling, but having believed in Jesus Christ we are now conscious of a wonderful rest—"The peace of God which passeth all understanding." We see that we are forgiven, justly forgiven, saved by mercy, but still not to the violation of the justice of God, and therefore we are perfectly at ease. Yea, and sometimes we rise beyond peace. I am not going to tell many of the high secrets of the inner life, this morning, but yet I will confess that at times

"Our joys divinely grow,
Unspeakable, like those above,
And heaven begins below."

This, again, is a part of the inner witness that the gospel is true.

And what if I were to speak of growing holiness of character, of increased conformity to Christ's image? Do not these form a good inner witness? What if I were to speak of growing strength, so that the things we dare not once attempt we now accomplish with ease, or of growing patience under tribulation. Either of these would be noble proofs. What if I spoke of fellowship with God, or of peace in the prospect of death, or of a thousand other blessings which make up Christian experience? Might I not claim that all these go to make up

a very powerful inner witness, which abundantly seals the truth which we at first accepted as matter of pure faith in the testimony of God.

III. As time hastens I will only pause for a moment to say that THIS INNER WITNESS IS EXCEEDINGLY EXCELLENT, first, because it is *very plain and easy to be understood*. Numbers of you have never read "Butler's Analogy," and if you were set to study it you would go to sleep over it. Never mind, you may have an unanswerable "analogy" in your own souls. You might not understand Butler or Paley, but you will understand the witness of your own spirit. You may talk to a rustic about mastication and digestion and assimilation, and he will open his eyes and wonder what you mean; but he will understand your practical meaning well enough if you give him a good dinner. So it is with the things of God: theological terms are difficult, but if you believe in Jesus Christ and he saves your soul, you will understand that he is the divine Saviour, and nobody will be able to gainsay the argument.

That is another point of its excellence,—that it is *unanswerable*. A man is told that a certain medicine is mere quackery, "See here," says he, "it healed me." What do you say to such an argument? You had better let the man alone. So when a Christian is told that the gospel is all nonsense he replies, "It saved me. I was a drunkard, and it made me sober, and more. I was a man of strong passions, and it tamed me, and more." What can you say to such facts? Why, nothing. It must be with you as with the rulers of old. "When they saw the man that was healed standing with Peter and John they could say nothing against them."

Such argument as this is *very abiding* in its results. A man who has been transformed, and feels himself daily renewed by the gospel, cannot be baffled, because every day his argument is renewed, and he finds fresh reasons within himself for knowing that what he believed is true. Such argument is *always ready to hand*. Sometimes if you are challenged to a controversy you have to reply, "Wait till I run upstairs and consult a few books," but when the evidence is personal—"I have felt it, I know it, I have tasted it, handled it"—why you have your argument at your fingers' ends at all times.

Such witness as this *gives a man great boldness*. He does not begin to conceal his opinions, or converse with his neighbour with an apologetical air, but he is positive and certain. I confess that when I have to argue about the truth of divine things it is a dreary task to me. I am so sure of these things myself, by living and actual test, that I wonder other people are not sure too; and while they are wanting me to argue about this point or that it seems to me like asking a man to prove that there is a sun in yonder sky. I bask in his beams, I swoon under his heat, I see by his light; and yet they ask me to prove his existence! Are the men mad? What do they want me to prove? That God hears prayer? I pray and receive answers every day. That God pardons sin? I was in my own esteem the blackest of sinners, and sunk in the depths of despair, yet I believed, and by that faith I leaped into a fulness of light and liberty at once. Why do they not try it themselves? You want me to prove that bread is fit for food. Why, men, I have been living upon it these years. I do not know how to begin my proof. Take a bit

of bread, man, and eat, and know for yourself. "Taste and see that the Lord is good." We believe, and are sure, and therefore we speak, but we do not wonder if men reject our witness, for they refuse the witness of God.

IV. I close by saying that excellent as this inner witness is, IT MUST NEVER BE PUT IN THE PLACE OF THE DIVINE WITNESS IN THE WORD. Why not? Because it would insult the Lord, and be contrary to his rule of salvation by faith. Because, moreover, it is not always with us in equal clearness, or rather, we cannot equally discern it. If the brightest Christian begins to base his faith upon his experience and his attainments, he will be in bondage before long. Beloved, build on what God hath said, and not upon your inward joys. Accept these precious things not as foundation stones, but as pinnacles of your spiritual temple. Let the main thing be—"I believe because God hath spoken." If any other evidence comes to your net, accept it, but go you on fishing by faith; faith in God, in God's naked word. Then, if the Lord's hand should turn, and you in providence should be stripped bare like Job, so that you sit on a dung-hill covered with sore boils, you will be able to say, "I did believe that God loved me when he gave me children; I did believe God loved me when I had sheep and oxen, I did believe that God loved me when I had camels and asses, but still these were not the grand reasons of my faith, but God himself, and therefore I still believe that he loves me, now that every child is dead, and all my property is swept away, and I myself am sick; yea, though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." That is faith. God grant you to have that faith which can sing, "Though the fig tree shall not blossom, and there shall be no herd in the stall, yet will I rejoice in the Lord." Though there be no evidences of grace in me, though there be no joys, though there be a broken peace, though there be sin to mourn over, though there be hardness of heart to stagger me; yet still I took the Lord Jesus as a sinners' Saviour at the first, and I take him as a sinners' Saviour still. I did not trust him at the first because I was a saint, and now I will not doubt him because I find out more and more that I am a sinner, but I will go still to him just as I am, and rest on the great salvation which God has provided for me.

Sinner, I charge you do not wish to put your notion of an inner witness into the place of God's own witness, which he bears to you and to every creature under heaven in his sacred word. You may not say, "I will trust Jesus, when I have the inner witness;" because you never can have the inner witness till you have first trusted in the redeeming Lord. Until you are willing to believe God's bare word, and come to Christ in all your guilt, and accept his cleansing blood and perfect righteousness, you never can have any evidence within, except it be evidence of your own folly and sinfulness. Therefore what is the use of your looking for it? Why seek the living among the dead? You cannot have this inner witness before believing, and you ought not to desire it, for the desire is unreasonable. I have shown you that it would be irrational to expect the Spirit of God to set his seal to a blank: how can he do so? If you will not believe God why should you expect to be saved, and if not saved, how can you have the inner witness? If a king were about to pardon men simply upon

this condition, that they would trust his mercy, and they were to answer, "We will not believe in your clemency except you indulge our whims," would you wonder if he did not pardon them? Moreover, let me ask you, how can you ever be right with God if you will not believe him? Certainly I could not count you to be my friend if you refused to believe my solemn statements. If you counted me a liar how could I call you my friend? What peace can there be till confidence is restored? Are not those God's enemies who refuse to believe his witness about his own Son? Now, my hearer, will you believe God or not? Dear soul, will you believe God or not? "Oh," say you, "but—" Now that is not the question. What "but" can there be about this matter? either the Lord is true or false. I know you can make a hundred "buts," but will you believe God, or will you make him a liar? O Spirit of the living God, show men the sin of unbelief, and bring them now to see how just and right a thing it is simply to trust God, and believe his witness concerning Jesus Christ. Now, I put you to this—If God be not worthy to be trusted, say so, and go your way; but if he be, if he has spoken the truth, why do you not believe him? If, after this, you refuse to believe in Jesus, your doom will be upon your own heads; but if you will trust Christ, you may rejoice, for you are saved. This is the gospel that we are bidden to preach to every creature,—“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.” God give his own blessing for Christ's sake.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John iii. 14—21;
I. John v.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—728, 533, 468.

Mr. SPURGEON has just issued two new books at one shilling each. “The Mourner's Comforter” is designed to cheer those who are in spiritual distress, and “The Bible and the Newspaper” is intended to show that useful lessons can be gathered from the events of every-day life. Both books have received the most gratifying notice from the press; they are attractively bound, and very suitable for gifts.—Passmore and Alabaster, Paternoster Buildings, London, and all Booksellers.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

FAITH'S SURE FOUNDATION.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 18TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

“He that believeth on him shall not be confounded.”—1 Peter ii. 6.

My sermon last Sabbath morning was upon the true position of the witness within, and I then tried to show that the warrant and ground of our believing in Christ unto eternal life is the witness which God himself has borne concerning his Son. Not our feelings, or experience, but the testimony of God, is to stand to us as the reason for our believing. I tried to set forth that doctrine very clearly, and I have been greatly delighted to find that the blessing of God rendered it effectual. I have met with five young men, who have each one said, “If this believing in Christ because God has set him forth, and borne witness to him, is really the way of salvation, then we are saved, and we come forward to declare that we are on the Lord’s side.” When a fisher fills his basket in one place he is glad to fish there again; and, therefore, close to the former spot, upon a subject near akin to it, I cast in my lines a second time. I do so the more readily in the hope that those who have been brought to Christ may be established in the present faith, and may see yet more clearly what is the basis of their salvation. As I tried on last Sabbath morning to show *why* they should believe, it shall now be my business to explain *what* they should believe. We will think not so much of the reason for believing as of the object of faith, the facts which are to be received, and the person who is to be trusted. We saw the Lord God laying the foundation upon which faith is to rest, we shall now consider the foundation itself.

The passage before us is a very favourite quotation with the apostles. If you turn to the Epistle to the Romans you will find Paul quoting it again and again in rapid succession. The last verse of the ninth chapter is, “Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed;” and in the eleventh verse of the tenth chapter he repeats the quotation. It is a quotation from Isaiah xxviii. 16, where we find it written thus: “Therefore thus saith the Lord God, behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a

stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste," which Paul interprets, "shall not be ashamed," and Peter renders, "shall not be confounded." From the variation of the translations we obtain two or three different shades of meaning, all amounting to the same thing. That must be a very important part of God's word which even the Holy Ghost himself has quoted so frequently. He is prolific of thought, and is ever able to create new ideas; he abounds in language, and cannot be straitened for expression, and yet he quotes himself in these three instances which I have given you: therefore we may be quite sure it is because no other expression would be more suitable. This sentence seemed to the divine author to be so full, so complete, and so forcible that he repeated it often. The harp is a choice one, let us play upon it, and let our ears drink in the melody—"He that believeth on him shall not be confounded."

I. I shall first of all this morning consider THE FOUNDATION OF THE BELIEVER'S FAITH, this being the main subject of our discourse, "He that believeth *on him*." The foundation of the believer's faith is Christ Jesus himself. The believer receives doctrine because Christ has taught it; but still it is not a doctrine which is the foundation of his confidence; it is a person, "He that believeth *on him*." The Lord Jesus himself, as the Son of God, is the object of our faith: it is upon him that we lean. The apostle doth not say in the Epistle to Timothy, "I know *what* I have believed," though that would be true, but "I know *whom* I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him." The faith which saves the soul is confidence in a person, reliance upon one who will certainly effect the salvation of those who trust him.

But in what sense am I to believe in Jesus Christ? Under what aspects does the believer rest in Christ? I reply, first, *as God's appointed Saviour of men*. Mark how the text runs in Isaiah. The Lord saith, "Behold *I lay* in Zion a sure foundation." We trust in Christ Jesus because God has set him forth to be the propitiation for sin. When sin first came into the world God in tender mercy gave our parents the first promise concerning the seed of the woman, who should bruise the serpent's head: we believe Jesus of Nazareth to be that seed of the woman, and we trust in him to bruise the serpent's head on our behalf. Promises were multiplied as the ages went on, and Jesus was set forth under various types and figures, but always as the Messiah, one whom God would send, who would undo the mischief of the fall, remove the guilt of sin, deliver ruined souls, and give them to partake of the mercy of God. Now, all those promises and prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus Christ the Son of God, and therefore we rest in him. Since God appoints him as a Saviour, we accept him as a Saviour. Since he comes authorised and empowered from the court of heaven to be the ambassador of peace we joyfully receive him, and find peace with God. We are glad to see the marks and seals upon him by which God the Father has certified him to be his beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased. We believe the apostolic witness by the mouth of John, "We have seen *and do* testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of *the world*." This is the great stronghold of our confidence.

We also believe in the Lord Jesus because of *the excellency of his person*. I began by saying that our faith was in a person, and so it is. We trust Christ to save us because we perceive him in every way to be adapted by the nature and constitution of his person to be the Saviour of mankind. It was needful that the Saviour of men should be a man. A man had broken the law, and a man must keep it; for only the obedience of man could answer the requirements of the law. By the sin of a man we became subject to punishment, and only by the penal sufferings of a man could the law be vindicated. It is with gladness that we perceive that the Son of God became a partaker of flesh and blood, and came under the law. Born of a virgin, he was wrapped in swaddling clothes like any other child: he grew in stature as other children do, and abode with his parents till the time of his showing to the world. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory." He laboured, he suffered, he died among us. He was really a man; but all the while a perfect man, without trace of fault; and thus he was able to fulfil the perfect law of God on our behalf. We rejoice as we see that Jesus is our next of kin to whom the right of redemption belongs, the perfect man, the second Adam of our race.

But yet more confident are we because we see that his manhood is in union with deity. We subscribe to that ancient confession, "He is very God of very God." In no diminished sense, but with the strongest emphasis which can be laid upon words, we believe him to be "God over all, blessed for ever." He is "Immanuel, God with us," and we each one salute him as "My Lord and my God." We perceive, that his deity must have put an infinite merit into the sufferings of his humanity, that because he was God he was able to undertake the stupendous labour of our redemption, and that his holy life and suffering death are, because of his godhead, fully equal to the redemption of the vast multitudes who by him do believe in God who raised him from the dead. My brethren, there is something here to rest upon. Surely we can trust him who is "the true God and eternal life." We see Jesus to be completely equipped for his work; divinely strong yet humanly compassionate, eternally existing as God, and yet capable of death because he was encompassed with a human body. O thou glorious One, whose name is fitly called Wonderful, my soul cannot imagine a Saviour in whom she could confide with so much ease. Jesus is worthy of all confidence. It seems now but natural to us who are believers to rest in such a person as he, who can with one hand touch the Godhead, and yet with the other hand embrace our nature, who is the Son of the Highest and yet the Son of Mary; "the mighty God, the everlasting Father," and yet a child born unto us, the Son of man. We trust Jesus because we see him to be first ordained of God, and then to be in himself fitly constituted to achieve our redemption.

Nor is this all. Another ground of our reliance upon Christ is *that he has actually finished the work of our redemption*. There were two things to be done. The first was the keeping of the law on our behalf: that he has performed to the uttermost, even as he said to his Father, "I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." The very best "Life of Christ" is the four gospels. We read them with delight; and we perceive the exceeding beauties of his

matchless character, and are fully agreed that he is "fairer than the children of men." Righteousness was the girdle of his loins, and he was clad with zeal as with a cloak. For innocence, he is spotless as the lily; for zeal he is red as the rose. There is no fault in our Beloved; in his character there is no redundancy and no deficiency; he is a lamb without blemish and without spot. His character is rounded with perfection. He fulfils both tables of the law, and presents unto God a perfect righteousness on our behalf. When the Lord presents that righteousness to us that it may be set to our account we feel the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord imputeth righteousness without works, and we are exceeding glad.

We see our Lord also doing the other part of his work, namely, suffering in consequence of our sin, and our faith becomes fully established. I do not know a more delightful exercise—I hope you are familiar with its delights—than to accompany our blessed Lord to the garden of Gethsemane. There every drop of blood pleads with us that we should trust him. There his sighs, and cries, and throes of anguish while he wrestles with his God all plead with us that we should rely upon him. Recollect who and what he was. Regarding him as the Son of the Highest we see an overwhelming argument for faith, for who can doubt the merit of that work which begins with the holy Son of God lying prostrate in Gethsemane, exceeding sorrowful, even unto death? We can surely trust our souls with a divine Saviour who suffered thus. Then, rising from the ground, we trace him as he is seized by his captors and hurried to the high priest, to Herod, and to Pilate. How they pour contempt upon him! How the smiters scourge him! How the abjects mock him! Now, indeed, he seems to be "a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people." His lowest shame, his worst desertion, his bitterest griefs, his dying pangs all say to us, "Cannot you trust him? When you see the Lord of angels derided, and his glorious name made into a by-word and a proverb, can you not trust in the merits of his substitutionary woes?" Then comes the death-scene: with tears in our eyes we stand at the cross and see those blessed hands and feet nailed to the tree that he might be made a curse for us. Can unbelief live after this? Ere his heart is opened by the spear-thrust we see it bleeding in every part of his body and soul, for he is a mass of anguish. Of his sufferings we do not dare to speak, for they are of a depth which no plumb line can ever fathom. O Son of God, if ever it were treason to doubt thy power to save, it must be so when we see thee hanging upon the cross. Thou hast triumphed over our unbelief upon the bloody tree. Now, thou dost lead our captivity captive, and we bow before thee, fully assured that thou art mighty to save. We feel constrained to cry, "I must believe. Those nails have crucified my unbelief, that spear has slain my doubts. I trust thee, O thou everlasting Son of God, when thus I see thee made a curse for me." It is upon the sufferings of our Lord Jesus that we rely for our cleansing: "The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed."

One other truth must be mentioned, seeing that our Lord is now no longer dead, we feel it more easy to place our confidence in him because *he ever liveth to see to the completion of our salvation.* A living faith delights in a living Saviour. This is the seal of all that went before.

He must have finished the transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness, or else he would not be sitting at the right hand of the Father, crowned with glory and honour. Beloved, that one sacrifice which our High Priest offered upon Calvary has put away all the sin of his people for ever : there is, therefore, no need of a repetition of it. It is blasphemous to talk of the "unbloody sacrifice of the mass" as a continuation of the one sacrifice, for it is finished. There is no continuation wanted, for "This man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God."

The righteousness with which we are clothed is completely woven, the fountain in which we are washed is completely filled, and now none can condemn those for whom Jesus died ; neither shall any soul be charged with sin whose sin he bore upon the accursed tree ; for "it is finished" hath ended every accusation. He liveth to take possession of heaven for his people, and he has entered it as our forerunner. He is our representative by whom we are in actual possession of heaven to-day. As a man holds a farm or other land by his agent, who is upon it to keep possession for him, so all the Lord's people have possession of heaven to-day by their representative. Being there, in our name, our Lord is preparing everything for us, that when the time shall come for us to climb to our thrones nothing may be lacking to complete our joys. Meanwhile he is pleading the merit of his blood on behalf of all those who trust him ; and he is also working by his unseen Spirit to preserve his own in every day of temptation, and keep them and perfect them that they may be presented faultless at the last before his presence with exceeding great joy. "Wherefore also he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

So then, our faith rests on this : God has set forth Christ to save us, Christ is in his constitution and person such a one as we can trust to do the deed, he hath already virtually accomplished it by his life and death, and he liveth to secure unto himself the result of what he hath done. For these most sufficient reasons we trust ourselves with the Redeemer, that he may save us from our sins. Into his hands we commit our spirits as unto a faithful Creator. This we do with all sincerity and deliberation, believing that these reasons will bear examination, and are such as none need to be ashamed of.

II. Secondly, let us consider THE MANNER OF THIS BELIEVING. How do we believe in Jesus Christ ? Now, we have not to go a single inch to find an instructive illustration of what faith in Jesus is. The verse before us is connected with building. "Wherefore also it is contained in the Scriptures, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious : and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded." Now, if we were to carry out the figure it would run thus : "He that is built upon him shall not be removed." So I take it that we can most naturally understand the laying of a stone upon the foundation to be suggested as a description of faith. If, then, you want to know what it is to believe on Jesus, it is to *lie upon him as a stone lies upon a foundation* when the mason puts it there. There is the foundation firm and strong, a precious corner-stone, tried and sure. Here is a smaller stone, quarried from the pit, and the builder places it upon the foundation. Its lying

on the foundation represents faith. Our souls' eternal interests are laid on Christ. The foundation bears up the stone, and holds it in its place; so Christ bears up our souls, and holds them in their position, so that they fall not to the ground. The stone presses with all its weight upon the foundation, and that is what the believer does with his Lord; he casts all his care upon him. Faith is leaning, depending, relying. As the key hangs on the nail, so hang we on Jesus. Faith is the giving up of self-reliance and self-dependence, and the resting of the soul upon him whom God has laid in Zion for a foundation. A stone thrown about from hand to hand is self-contained and independent, but when the mason puts it on the foundation it is dependent, it leans on the corner-stone upon which it is placed. Poor tempted soul. That is just what you have to do: you must not be a loose stone resting on yourself, and tossed hither and thither upon the earth, but you must lie still upon Christ, and let him bear your whole weight upon himself.

A stone rests wholly on the foundation. If a wall is well built it is not shored up with timber so that the stones have two supports, but the whole structure rests on a common basis. There is a good foundation, and each stone lies upon it. It can do no more, for it could not keep its place for an instant if the foundation were removed. If the foundation fails the stone falls, but while the foundation stands the stone remains secure. That is faith: resting upon Christ wholly and entirely, looking to him for everything that has to do with our salvation. Genuine faith in Christ does not trust *him* to pardon sin, and then trust *itself* to overcome sin. No, it trusts Christ both for the conquest of evil and for the forgiveness of it. Some of our friends make a great muddle here. They say they believe that the Lord Jesus will keep them as long as they are faithful to him. That is true; but where do you rely for your being faithful to him? Do you depend upon yourself for faithfulness? If so, there is a very weak spot in your confidence. That stone is not lying square upon the foundation, push it more home; it must not stand out of the line, or it will be over directly. Personally I do as much depend upon my Lord to keep me to the end as to pardon the past; and I feel that I need him as much for to-morrow as for to-day. I could not rejoice in him as a Saviour if he would only promise to keep me as long as I kept myself; for I need a keeper to keep me that I may keep myself. If his promise was that he would keep me "*if*"—alas! that "*if*" would spoil it all. There must be no reliance upon anybody else but Christ for anything that has to do with your salvation, or you are not laid square on the foundation. Whether it be as to your regeneration by which you enter into life, or your ultimate perfection by which that life shall come to its complete maturity, there must be no reliance for you but upon Christ. Dear friends, see to it that for everything, for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, you lie plumb and straight with Christ. See no man save Jesus only. Ye are complete in him: add not to perfection. It is the not getting down to the foundation and resting nakedly upon Christ which makes the most of our soul-trouble. There used to be on the top of Snowdon a raised platform for certain people to stand upon who wanted to see a little further than others. Now, if you get upon that platform, it may shake and tremble,

but the mountain never does. I have known brethren build up a pretty little wooden platform of their own experience; some of them have built it so high that they talk about being perfect, or very near it. These wooden affairs shake with a little extra weight, and make people tremble. Get down upon the Rock; stand on *terra firma*, rest on the everlasting love of Jesus, and you will be safe. Take care to lie flat on the promise; get as low as you can, and grasp the Rock. Lie flat on Christ as a stone lies on the foundation; for that is the proper and natural position of all the living stones that are built up in him.

The stone laid on the foundation comes closer to that foundation every day. "To whom coming," says Peter, "as unto a living stone." When a house is finished there still goes on a measure of settlement, and you are glad if it settles all in a piece together. Every day the stone is brought by its own weight a little closer to the foundation; may every day's pressure bring you and me closer to Christ, Oh, that the pressure of our joys and griefs may press us nearer to our Lord!

A well-built stone gets to be one with the foundation. In the old Roman walls the mortar seems to be as hard as the stones, and the whole is like one piece; you must blow it to atoms before you can get the wall away. So is it with the true believer: he rests upon his Lord till he grows up into him, till he is one with Jesus by a living union, so that you scarce know where the foundation ends and where the up-building begins; for the believer becometh all in Christ, even as Christ is all in all to him.

I hardly know any illustration that would better explain faith. It is none of mine, you see; it is taken from the text itself. The Lord help you to lie upon Christ for all that concerns your eternal interests. "But," saith one, "I thought I had to do something for my own salvation?" Does the stone do anything to maintain its position beyond lying in its place? Your strength is to sit still. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him, for your expectation is from him. There is plenty for you to do for your Lord, to show your love to him, and to glorify his name; but you cannot add to the foundation of your confidence, nor should you dream of doing so. How could you improve what your Lord declares to be finished? Is not his work all-sufficient? Do you want to move the foundation? Does it not stand fast for ever? Lean on it steadily, and let this be your chief concern. O poor fainting believer, the more thou canst lean upon Jesus the better he will be pleased. "Lean hard," he cries, "and prove thy love to me." Trust Jesus for everything, and trust him at all times; trust him in life, and in death, and to eternity, and thou shalt not be ashamed or confounded, world without end.

III. We have, thirdly, to consider THE EVIL WHICH WILL NEVER COME UPON THE MAN WHO BELIEVETH ON JESUS. The text says, "He shall not be confounded," and the meaning of it is, first, that he shall never be *disappointed*. All that Christ has promised to be he will be to those who trust him. If the Father set forth Christ to save the believing sinner depend upon it he will be as good as his Father's word. He does not begin to build and then leave off from want of means. He will keep the believer, he will support the believer, he will perfect the believer. You shall never have to say of Christ at last, "Well, there is

much good in him, but not so much as I expected." You will never have to lament, "Alas, I placed too implicit a reliance upon the Christ of God, and I am deceived," No, never! but, on the contrary, you will exclaim with the Queen of Sheba, "The half has not been told me." Even inspiration itself could not tell us, so that we could fully understand it, how sweet, how excellent, how sure, how full our Lord is. We know his love, but yet it "passeth knowledge." When you know more of your Lord you will say, "I wish I had never doubted him, for I never had a cause. Oh that I had trusted him more fully, for he has never disappointed me, but far exceeded my largest hopes." In consequence of our not being disappointed in our hope we shall never be *ashamed* of having indulged it. Alas! some Christians are at times ashamed to own their Master, but that is not what is meant in the text: what is intended here is the grand truth that they shall never have any cause to be ashamed of Jesus upon whom they believe. They shall never be driven to confess that they made a mistake in trusting him, and are, therefore, ashamed at having been so miserably duped. No believer will ever say, "I came with a child-like reliance and did cast myself upon him, because he promised so fairly, but I was taken in a snare. I ought to have known better, and I am quite ashamed of my credulity." No, no; the most childlike confidence in God in Christ Jesus is nothing more than he deserves. Credulity towards Jesus is the purest reason. You are always most prudent when you cast away all caution, and throw yourself upon Jesus, sink or swim. It can never be prudent to doubt him who is "the truth," but it is always the highest wisdom to place all in his hands, and leave it there for time and for eternity. To risk all with Jesus is to end all risk. Our hymn saith—

"Venture on him, venture wholly;
Let no other trust intrude."

But, indeed, there is no venturing in it; it is safe as the throne of the Eternal; may the Holy Ghost lead you to make speedy trial of it.

And then comes the next rendering—you shall never be *confounded*. When a man gets to be ashamed of his hope because he is disappointed in it, he casts about for another anchorage, and, not knowing where to look, he is in a troubled state, and greatly perplexed. If the Lord Jesus Christ were to fall through, my brethren, what should we do? It is a supposition which we need not indulge, but if he be not true there remains no other person in whom we may confide. There are many religions on the face of the earth, but no one of them bears as much comparison with our holy faith as a candle to the sun; they are all hollow mockeries, offering nothing which can satisfy a hungry heart. Lord, to whom should we go if we should turn from thee? Whither could we fly? If wisdom be not in thee, where shall we search for it? "The depth saith, It is not in me: and the sea saith, It is not with me." There remains no hiding place for man if this cleft of the rock be closed; no ransom from wrath if this redemption price be null and void. No, Jesus, we shall not be confounded, for we shall never be disappointed in thee, nor made ashamed of our hope!

According to Isaiah's version we shall not be obliged to *make haste*; we shall not be driven to our wit's end and hurried to and fro. We shall

not hurry and worry, and fret, and fume, trying this and trying that, running from pillar to post to seek a hope; but he that believeth shall be quiet, calm, collected, assured, confident. He awaits the future with equanimity, as he endures the present with patience. Beloved, see what a blessed promise this is to those of you who are believing on Jesus.

Now, the times of our special danger of being confounded are many; but in none of these shall we be confounded. Let us just turn them over in our minds. There are times when a man's sins all come up before him like exceeding great armies. It is a mighty easy thing to think that you are believing in Christ when you are not conscious of any great sin; but true faith is not confounded, even when it groans under a grievous sense of sin, conscious that it is the chief of sinners. Nay, though sin rolled over the believer's head, he would still believe; as David did when he cried, "Mine iniquities are gone over mine head." Have you never had times in which all the ghosts of your dead and buried sins rise again, and come marching upon you armed to the teeth? If you have never experienced such a visitation, I hope you may, for it is good for us to be driven to our Lord Jesus by distress of soul. All your thoughts, words, and deeds, your bad tempers and rebellions against God—suppose they were all to rise at once, what would become of you? Why, even then, my brethren, "he that believeth on him shall not be confounded"—not even by a sense of horrible sin, for after he has seen the whole horde of his sins march by, he cries, "they are all gone into the tomb where Jesus slept, the blood of Jesus has cleansed me from them. The depths have covered them, there is not one of them left; they sank like lead in the mighty waters, for God hath cast them all into the depths of the sea." He that believeth on the pardoning Saviour shall not be confounded, though all his sins should accuse him at once.

The unbelieving world outside labours to create confusion. The gentlemen of the higher criticism, the scientific discoverers, the possessors of boastful culture, and all the other braggers of this marvellously enlightened nineteenth century are up in arms against the believers in Jesus. When I think of how this century has been befooled by its statesmen and philosophers, I, for one, feel small reverence for it. Perhaps it has the most light, but it has not the best eyes. Well, let all this wisdom of the world assail us! Let proud pretenders point their finger at us and say, "You trust in Christ; you rely upon Jesus of Nazareth alone for your salvation; you are old-fashioned, and as much out of place as the extinct animals would be if they could come back again." I protest that if all the sages of the world were to utter one thundering sarcasm, if they concentrated all their scorn into one universal sneer of contempt, I do not think it would now affect me the turn of a hair, so sure am I that my Lord will justify my confidence. "I know whom I have believed," and I know also that my Lord Jesus Christ "sitteth above the floods; the Lord sitteth King for ever." "Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing?" He can save me, and I trust him to perform all that which concerneth me. Faith in Jesus can be justified before a synagogue of *savans*, it deserves the respect of a parliament of philosophers. To trust the Son of God incarnate, whose advent into this world is a fact better proved by history than any other that was ever on record—to trust oneself upon his atoning sacrifice

is the most reasonable thing that a man can do. There is nothing illogical about it, nothing which demands apology. We fling back in the teeth of the scoffers the charge of unreasoning dogmatism—ours is the most reasonable of all beliefs. O ye mighty thinkers and sceptics, you are more credulous than we are. We may seem fools to you; but we are not judged of your judgment. Ye shall see your own folly when he cometh whose name is Faithful and True—when he cometh to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. He that believeth on him shall not be confounded by human wisdom, for God hath long ago confounded it and turned it into foolishness.

But the world has done more than sneer; it has imitated Cain and sought to slay the faithful. The enemies of the gospel have raged fiercely against the church of God. What opportunities has God given to them to conquer if they could! Christ has seemed to say, "Come on, world; here are my poor disciples whom you despise; come and see if you can conquer them! I give you a fair opportunity. There is the Colosseum; heap up tier upon tier of men and women with cruel eyes and savage hearts. Bring out the saints. Cry, 'Christians, to the lions!'" There they stand. The lions are loose upon them. Do they cry for mercy, and treacherously deny Christ? They are feeble men and women; do they recant and leave their Master? Not they. They die as bravely as ever soldier fell in battle. The enemy resolves to try them with torture, with rack, and rod, and fire; let us see what will come of it. Blandina shall be tossed upon the horns of bulls, and then shall be placed in a hot iron chair. Does her womanly nature flinch? Ah, no; she is more than a conqueror. They try every kind of torment with the saints, but they fail in every case. Recollect Marcus Arethusa, smeared with honey and a hive of bees put upon him, yet never for a single moment relenting. Every form of possible cruelty has in later persecutions been tried by the familiars of Rome's infernal inquisition; but believers have not been confounded. Fiends in human form have glutted themselves with blood till they have turned away from Christian destruction as from a hopeless task: they saw that they could not overcome the true people of God, for "he that believeth on him shall not be confounded." They tried persecution in this land in the days of Queen Mary, but their defeat was self-evident. Weavers and ploughmen defied bishops and cardinals, and held their own. Even women laughed to scorn the wretched sophistries of their tormentors. Tompkins trusted in God and stood firm when Bonner held his hand in the candle, and equally well did he play the man at the stake. What notable stories Foxe has preserved for us of how the saints of the Lord clapped their burning hands, and cried, "None but Christ!" while the flames were devouring them. The enemy could not confound them. If persecution should revive we shall conquer again, for "he that believeth on him shall not be confounded." We cannot strike our adversaries, but by bearing their blows we shall, like the anvil, break the hammers. As it hath been until now so shall it be unto the end, we shall not be ashamed of our hope.

Well, but there will come other troubles to Christians besides these, and in them they shall not be confounded. They will be tried by the flesh; natural desires will break forth into vehement lustings, and

corruptions will seek to cast them down. Will believers perish then? No. He that believeth in Christ shall conquer himself, and overcome his easily besetting sins. There will come losses and crosses, business trials and domestic bereavements. What then? He shall not be confounded; his Lord will sustain him under every tribulation. At last death will come to us. They will wipe the cold sweat from our brows, and we shall gasp for breath; but we shall not be confounded then. We may not be able to shout "victory"; we may be too weak for triumphant hymns, but with our latest breath we will lisp the precious name. They that watch us shall know by our serenity that a Christian does not die, but only melts away into everlasting life. O beloved, we shall never be confounded, even amid the grandeurs of eternity. We shall pass into the next state, and after a while the trumpet shall sound, and these bodies shall rise, and we shall stand amidst the countless throng on that august day for which all other days were made. While other men who have other foundations to rest upon shall cry to the rocks to hide them we shall stand calmly and quietly, adoring our Lord the Judge. It will be a solemn day even for us. We shall not be able to see the rocks rending and stars falling, and creation itself passing away, without deep solemnity, yet assuredly the words of our hymn are true—

"Bold shall I stand in that great day,
For who aught to my charge shall lay?
While through his blood absolved I am
From sin's tremendous curse and shame?"

We will tell the Father in that day that we have rested on the salvation which he appointed, that we have confided in his own dear Son, and that we believed that the blood of Jesus did make atonement for our sin. We shall not find that he disowns his promise. Oh, if that foundation could fail us, how ashamed and confounded should we be! I do not know, but I sometimes seem to think that if the gospel could possibly be a mistake, we should have the consolation of being able to say, "Great God, it was through love of thee and trust in thee that we fell into this error"; and we should at least have as good a plea as the self-righteous can offer. But it shall not be so, our foundation cannot fail us; we shall not be confounded. The two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie are our strong consolation.

Now I close by saying that the reason of our knowing that we can never be confounded is just this, because the testimony we have received is true. It is God's testimony; there cannot be a lie in that. Next, the person on whom we lean is true; there can be no falsehood in Christ Jesus, nor failure in him. The Saviour in whom we trust is almighty, he cannot possibly be defeated, or too heavily loaded. The declarations of the word of God in which we trust are infallible and immutable; they cannot be altered one jot or tittle. The Father of lights is without variableness, and Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." No believer in Christ can ever be confounded—mark this word—till the godhead itself shall be undeified. I put it strongly. Until God the Father can break his word he cannot destroy a soul that believes in his Son; and if he were to break his word (the mere supposition borders on blasphemy) then he would

no longer be God, since truth is essential to deity. Until Christ himself shall fail he cannot refuse to save one that trusteth in him; and if he were to fail it would prove that he was not omnipotent, and could not therefore be God. And if the Spirit of God which hath wrought us to the selfsame thing, even to this day, were after all to deny his own witness, and suffer the new life which is in us to die out, then he were not the almighty, indwelling Quickener and Comforter of former days. No, beloved, everything hangs upon the divine fidelity. If believers are lost, God loses more than they do, for he loses his honour, he loses his character for truthfulness, and the glory of his name is tarnished. If I am a sheep and I am lost, I am a great loser certainly; but then I am not my own, but belong to the Great Shepherd, and he has lost me, and so is a loser too. If I am a member of Christ's body and I am lost, I am a great loser certainly, but my Head is a loser too, for henceforth his body is incomplete. The church is the fulness of Christ, "the fulness of him that filleth all in all"; and, I venture to say it, Jesus Christ were not a perfect Christ if he lost the very least and meanest of those who put their trust in him. It would be hell's boast against him to all eternity that he could not keep his own. If the devil could get a believer in hell, what a noise he would make about him! "Jesus of Nazareth, here is one of thine own, one who trusted in thee, and yet he is in hell. Thou didst keep the strong because they kept themselves, but thou couldst not keep the weak, and therefore here is one, lost, lost for ever." How would hellish malice exult if such an occasion for scorn were given. But it shall never be. Because Jesus lives we shall live also, and shall not be confounded. Let us rest in our Lord's faithfulness, and accept the pledges of his eternal affection.

"His honour is engaged to save
The meanest of his sheep;
All that his heavenly Father gave
His hands securely keep.

"Nor death nor hell shall e'er remove
His fav'rites from his breast;
In the dear bosom of his love
They must for ever rest."

Amen and amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hebrews vi.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—395, 550, 397.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

REFINED, BUT NOT WITH SILVER.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.”—Isaiah xlviii. 10.

THE Lord refines his people, but he exercises great discrimination as to the means by which he does so. A silver furnace is one of the very best for the removal of dross, and would seem to be well adapted for refining the most precious things, but it is not choice enough for the Lord's purpose with his people. It is prepared with extreme care, and has great separating power, but the purging away of sin needs greater care and more cleansing energy than a silver refinery can supply. The greatest delicacy of skill is exhibited by the refiner, who watches over the process, and regulates the degree of heat and the length of time in which the precious metal shall lie in the crucible: this, then, might well serve as a figure of the best mode of sanctification, but evidently the figure falls short in its delicacy. The process of silver refining is, no doubt, one of the best arranged and most ably conducted of the works of man; but when the Lord sits as a refiner, he executes his work with greater wisdom and diviner art. Silver refining is but rough work compared with the Lord's purification of his people, and therefore he says, “I have refined thee, but not with silver.” The Lord hath a furnace of his own, as it is written, “his furnace is in Jerusalem,” and in this special furnace he purifies his people by secret processes unknown to any but himself. He has a fire of his own kindling in Zion, compared with which all other flame is strange fire, and only in this peculiar fire will he in his own singular fashion consume his people's dross and tin. His saints are more precious than silver or gold, and therefore while in one place it is written, “Thou hast tried us as silver is tried,” yet in another he declares that he has gone about it after a diviner sort, and hath refined us, “but not with silver.” No one would think of refining silver by the same rough means as they smelt iron, so neither will the Lord purify his precious ones, who are far above silver in value, by any

but the choicest methods. More subtle and yet more searching, more spiritual and yet more true, more gentle and yet more effectual are the purifying processes of heaven ; there is no refiner like our refiner, and no purity like that which the Spirit works in us.

Note, then, that distinguishing and discriminating grace finds room to exercise itself even in the trials of the elect : "I have chosen thee in the furnace, yet not in the best furnace that man could make, but in a furnace of my own, which I reserve for my peculiar treasures." There is distinguishing grace in all the trials of God's people. Every man in the world has a measure of trial, for "we are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward"; but there is a distinction between the sorrows of the wicked and the trials of the righteous—a very grave distinction between the punishments of the ungodly and the chastisements of them that fear God. There is a furnace for each metal, but the more precious the ore the more special the refining. There is a furnace for all men—for kings upon their thrones, to whom sickness and bereavement come as freely as to the poor; for the rich in the midst of their wealth, from whom their substance departeth, or their power to enjoy what they have heaped together : but there is a special fire, a reserved furnace, into which neither the great ones of the earth nor the wealthy ones thereof shall ever be placed ; it is kept for more precious material than the unregenerate children of men. God's furnace in Zion is especially meant for his own people. Of each of these right royal jewels he says, "I have refined thee, not with the precious things of earth—the kings and princes, the silver ones among mortals ; but I have refined thee in a different manner, and thus I make my election to be visible, even in connection with the furnace in which I refine my treasures."

I will push the thought a little farther, dear friends, and remark that the Lord has special dealings with each one of his saints, and refines each one by a process peculiar to the individual, not heaping all his precious metals into one furnace of silver, but refining each metal by itself. You do not know my trials, I am glad you do not : neither do I know yours, nor could I wish to bear that which you may have to suffer. There is a common sympathy, for we all go into the furnace ; but there is a distinction in the case of each one, for to each one the furnace differs. Some tender hearts would be utterly crushed if they were afflicted as others are. Does not even the husbandman teach us this? He does not beat out the tender cummin and fitches with the cart wheel which he turns upon the heavier grain. No ; he has different modes of operating upon the different kinds of seeds. They must all be thrashed, but not all thrashed in the same way. Thou, brother, mayest be as a sheaf of the best corn. Be thou grateful ; but remember thou shalt feel the sharp thrashing instrument having teeth. And thou, my brother, mayest be one of the tender seeds, the minor seeds of the Master's garner. Be thou grateful, for thou shalt feel a lighter flail than some others ; but do not compliment thyself upon it, for thou mightest almost regret that gentler flail, because it proves that thou art of lighter stuff, although still true grain of the Master's sowing.

Beloved, I would venture to go so far as to say that the lines have not fallen to any two men in precisely the same places. We rejoice as

we read the life of David, because he seems to set us all forth. David is to the church of God what Shakespeare is to the world:—

“A man so various, that he seems to be
Not one, but all mankind’s epitome;”

and yet David is totally distinct from any other of the saints. There are not, and could not be, two Davids. So you and I may travel in lines almost parallel, and we may therefore know each other’s griefs, and tenderly sympathize, but there is a turning in my life which you have never reached, and there is a dark corner in your life which I have never seen. The skeleton in any one person’s house is of a different sort to that which haunts any other dwelling. No one man is the exact replica of another. In all this, divine sovereignty operates in connection with divine love and divine wisdom, purifying all the sons of Levi, giving to each one his own separate purification, according as his need may be. “I have refined *thee*, but not with silver. I have chosen *thee*.” Mark—not “you,” but “*thee*.” A distinct personal word is used, and is addressed to each separate saint. “I have refined *thee*, but not with silver; I have chosen *thee* in the furnace of affliction.”

Having thus sufficiently shown that distinguishing grace is to be seen even in the trials of the chosen, we will now turn to the subject of this evening, which is the sweet connection which exists between God’s election and the furnace. I have many things to say to you, and therefore I will say them as briefly as I can, asking you to jot them down upon the tablets of your memory, and enlarge upon them when you are alone.

I. And, first, between God’s election and the furnace there is this connection—that **THE FURNACE WAS THE FIRST TRYSTING PLACE BETWEEN ELECTING LOVE AND OUR SOULS.**

God did not choose his people in the furnace in any sense in which it can be said that he never chose them before they were there, for he chose them before the foundation of the world. Before one solitary star had begun to peer through the darkness the Lord had given over his people unto Christ to be his heritage, and their names were in his book; but the first manifestation of his electing love to anyone of us was—where? Well, I venture to say it was in the furnace. Abraham knew little of God’s love to him till the voice said, “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee.” This was a grievous trial for him: the breaking up of family ties and associations was a furnace to him; and then it was that he knew that God had chosen him, for the same voice said, “And I will bless thee, and thou shalt be a blessing.” I do not think that Isaac knew much about God’s choice of him till he went up the mountain’s side, and said to his father, “Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” When he found out that the burnt sacrifice was to be himself, it was there that he, like his father knew Jehovah-Jireh, and learned the covenant. So was it with Jacob. Little did he understand the mystery of electing love till he lay down one night with the stones for his pillow, the hedges for his curtains the skies for his canopy, and no attendant but his God; and as he

slept, even there at the furnace-mouth, an exile from his parents and his home, he began to understand that God had highly favoured him in his electing love. Certainly, Israel as a nation did not understand God's election till the people were in Egypt; and then, when Goshen, the land of plenty, became a land of brickmaking and sorrow and grief, and the iron bondage entered into their souls, they cried unto God, and began to understand that secret word—"I have called my son out of Egypt." They knew then that God had put a difference between Israel and Egypt. The more they were oppressed the more they multiplied; the more they were afflicted the more God blessed them; and they perceived that the hand of God was in this, and that he had met with them there in the furnace of affliction. Yes, if you want the trysting place of the electing God with the chosen soul, it is just there, at the back of the desert, where the bush burns with fire and yet is not consumed. Now mayest thou put off thy shoe from off thy foot, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground, while out of the bush there comes the voice—"I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." God finds his people in the place of trial and distress, and there he reveals himself in his special character as their God. Did he not say to Moses, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and I have heard their cry"?

We will settle this matter by personal experience. When did *you* first know anything about God's choice of you? Was it not when you were in trouble—in many cases in *temporal trouble*? You had prospered in the world for years, and you knew not God, but you were like the prodigal son, wasting your substance in riotous living. By-and-by things went against you, and you became poor, and sick, and sorry, and then it was that you began to think of the Father's house, and resolved to fly to it. Then it was that electing love began to deal with you. I own that it was not so in all cases. With some of us it was very different; but I make no kind of exception to another rule, namely, that we first began to learn electing love when we were in *spiritual distress*. When that fine righteousness of ours turned out to be a spider's cobweb, when that hope on which we had built so fondly began to rock and reel beneath our feet, when we found ourselves on the borders of death and at the gates of hell; it was then that free grace and dying love rang out most sweetly in our ear. We had often kicked against the doctrine of free grace before, but now we clutched at it as a hungry man at a piece of bread, which before he had despised. We saw that it was the only hope for us, and we turned to it; and, blessed be God, we found salvation. Would our proud wills have ever bent before the sceptre of sovereign grace if they had not first been melted in the furnace of soul-trouble? Should we have ever known that the Lord killeth and maketh alive if we had not ourselves been slain by the fire of his word? Had he not permitted us to lie like Nebuchadnezzar's guards, slain at the furnace mouth, we should never have known the truth. "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." While we heard the thunder roll—"I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion"—we bowed our heads meekly, accepted the grace which was in Christ Jesus, and at the

furnace mouth, for the first time in our lives, we understood this text, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction."

II. We will now pass on to a second remark, which grows out of this. It is very clear that **THE FURNACE OF AFFLICTION DOES NOT CHANGE THE ELECTION OF GOD.** If he chose us in it, then his choice stands good while we are in it and when we are out of it. If the very first knowledge we had of his electing love found us at the gates of despair, we can never be worse than we were then, nor can his love see less to rest upon. If he loved us at our worst, when we were dead in sin, and quickened us, much more, then, now that we are quickened and forgiven, he will continue still to love us. Yet have I known a great many fears cross the mind of God's anxious people when the smoke of the furnace has brought tears into their eyes. So let me declare a plain word—no amount of trouble, no degree of pain, no possibility of grief can change the mind of God towards his people.

The furnace may alter the believer's circumstances, but not his acceptance with God. You were a fine gentleman once, you had a large house and grounds, but now you have to be satisfied with a small room and scant fare. You were a fine well-built young fellow once, but now you are a grey old man. Everybody bade you good morrow once; nobody knows you now. Forsaken by flatterers and forgotten by friends, you might sit down and weep, were it not that the only Being worth caring for loves you now as much as ever, and selects this as a season for declaring his love towards you. Ah, your Lord did not love you for your coat, nor for your house, nor for your health and beauty, for he "taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man." He loved you of old for reasons known only to his own sacred heart, and he loves you now the same as ever. O dear soul, do not be at all discouraged because thou art going down the hill into deep adversities, for his love will go with thee. The Lord's love does not rise and fall like the thermometer according to the temperature of the surrounding air. Oh no, but it abideth the same to his people, whatever their condition.

The furnace very often alters our friends. They know us before we go into the furnace, we are so fresh and fair they are glad to know us; but we come out so wrinkled and scorched that they are ready to run away from us. Like Job, we have to mourn that our familiar acquaintances forget us. Ay, but God does not thus change. He is not "a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent." "I am God," saith he, "I change not." Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, and his friendship never turns to hate or to forgetfulness. Blessed be his name, he hath known my soul in adversity, and made the valley of Achor to be a door of hope to me, and therefore I must and will speak well of his name.

Yes, and the furnace changes us very wonderfully. Do you think some of you would know yourselves of twenty years ago if you were to meet yourselves in the street? I hardly think you would. You have undergone a marked change; have you not? Aches and pains of body have altered you terribly. Your juvenile elasticity of spirit has altogether vanished, and your outward appearance is very much the worse for wear. Ah, you have altered, but your God has not. What a mercy it is that though eternal ages roll over his immutability, they

cannot effect the shadow of a turning. He standeth fast like the great mountains, and we, like the clouds that melt upon the mountain's brow, do come and go, for we are, and are not—the mists of an hour. He is the same, and of his years there is no end, and this is our consolation while we sing with Moses, "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God."

I want you to believe very firmly in the fixity of the divine choice, so that when you next enter the furnace you may have no doubt about eternal faithfulness. When you lie sick by the week or by the month together, or when you are driven away from home, or plunged in poverty, or bereaved of friends, do not say in your heart, "God has forgotten to be gracious. He hath cast me away from his heart." It cannot be, for the bonds of divine love cannot be snapped. To prevent its being supposable that the Lord casts away his people, because they are in adverse circumstances, the text says the very contrary—"I have chosen thee *in* the furnace of affliction."

III. So now we hasten onward to notice another truth. Thirdly, **THE FURNACE IS THE VERY ENSIGN OF ELECTION.**

The escutcheon—the coat of arms—of election is the furnace. You know that it was so in the old covenant which God made with Abraham. He gave him a type when the victim was divided. When a deep sleep fell upon the patriarch there passed before him a smoking furnace and a burning lamp,—two signs that always mark the people of God. There is a lamp to light them, but there is also a smoking furnace to try them. "No cross, no crown," was true of old as it is true now. It is the escutcheon of the covenant. If you think of our great Master's dying will and testament, what is its prominent codicil? "In the world ye shall have tribulation." You may be quite sure that if you belong to Jesus "in the world ye shall have tribulation." Do you want to erase that sentence from the will? Then, you must give up the whole deed of gift; you must give up the sweet blessing as well as that which looks like a bitter warning. The child of God must feel the smarting rod. Sooner or later, in some form or other, the Lord sets his mark upon his people, and his mark is the furnace mark. Some of you youngsters have not received it yet. You will have it. Before you get to heaven you are sure to have it. As the king sets a broad arrow on all his stores, so does the King of kings set his mark on all his people. You must, I say, pass under the rod of the covenant, it is the ensign of God's love. Do you not see that thus he shows his love to his own? You do not think of giving a flogging to a boy who is none of yours. A stranger may do as he likes, but if it is your own boy who is caught in mischief, you will not spare the rod. If you are a child of the devil, you may go and sin as you please, and may even prosper all the more in worldly things; but if you are one of God's children, you will be scourged as sure as you transgress. Has he not himself said, "You only have I known of all the nations of the earth, therefore I will punish you for your iniquities."

That the Lord refines us shows his value of us. A man does not build an elaborate furnace and then cast into it odd stones and heaps

of useless slag. You would say, "What are you wasting all your fuel for?" and he could not give you a rational answer. But if you see ingenious contrivances, lavish use of fuel, and the application of refining apparatus, and the person who is using them says, "This is silver, or this is gold;" you know at once that the ore is worth the fuel, and will repay the labour and expense. So, dear friends, if we are precious in the sight of the Lord, he will bring us through the fire; rest assured of that. If he regards us as mere refuse he may let us rest in quiet, but for precious ore there are many torturing processes in store. A man does not take his knife and go through the wood and prune all the dog roses, and the blackberries, and the hawthorns; he does not care enough about them. But if he be a gardener, see how he purges the vines and cuts the fruit trees. My gardener cut my roses back so very much that I thought no flowers could ever come, but when I saw the luxuriant roses I owned that he and his knife knew more than I. Good roses must be cut back; and God's saints must be afflicted. God's people will pay for pruning, but wild vines will not. So it is a type and mark of the love which God has for them that he chooses them in the furnace of affliction.

And it is a mark, in another way, that when God afflicts his children it shows that he is not going to let them have their portion in this life. It was a deed characteristic of Martin Luther when a great man called to see him, and having spent some few hours with him, gave him, I think, a hundred crowns. Martin said, "I must get rid of this; I will not have my portion in this life, I must give this to the poor at once." He used to talk in this fashion—God gives his dogs plenty. See how rich is the Pope, and the Grand Turk: they can have any quantity of gold and silver, but I am not his dog, and I am not going to be fed so. He is not going to put me off with gold and silver. I am looking for my heritage in the world to come. Now, my brethren, the Lord does not try many of you in that manner. He keeps you on short commons, embitters your bread, and mingles wormwood with your cup. Why is this? Why, because you are not to have your portion here. You once half thought you might have two heavens, but you were deceived. The other day you began feathering your nest, but a sharp thorn has been put into it of late. You are one of the Lord's birds, and he wants you to be much on the wing, and little in the nest, therefore does he make it uneasy for you. This is not your rest, make it as comfortable as you may. Though godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, yet this is not our rest; and woe unto us if we try to make it so. All the trees in this forest are marked with the axe, and they are all to come down: you may build up there, Sir Crow, as fine a nest as you desire, but it *must* come down. Build your nests, my brethren, on the everlasting rocks where God's eagles make their eyrie, high above the reach of time and change, in the eternal purpose and everlasting love of God; for your portion is not for the present, neither can you be satisfied with the world, try as you will. Enough upon this point: it is plain that the furnace is one of the ensigns of the election of grace.

IV. Fourthly, THE FURNACE IS THE WORKSHOP OF ELECTING LOVE.

What are we elected to, if God has chosen us? Why, he has chosen us unto holiness. There is no man in this world chosen to go to heaven apart from being made fit to go there. We are chosen to be made the children of God, chosen to be made like Christ. Well, now, in the hand of God, the blessed Spirit, the furnace often becomes very helpful to this end, for it consumes much of our dross. Do you ask me what sort of dross does a man lose in the furnace? I answer, affliction helps to remove many a superfluity of naughtiness, but there is one which I will tell you of at once, and that is mushroom faith, and wild-fire joy. We have a great store of the fictitious and unreal, especially when we begin. Then we are mighty big Christians, and are likely to surpass all that have gone before us. I do not know whether we have not reached the higher life, but certainly we are quite near it, for we are very rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing. It is wonderful what fine saints we are until we are tried, and then our beauty consumes away like a moth. The Lord puts us into the furnace three or four days, and we wonder where one-half of us has gone. He keeps us there another week or two, and we shrivel in a most satisfactory manner. What have we lost? Any grace? No, brother, no man ever lost any grace in the furnace yet. What have we lost? Well, we have lost what we thought was grace: we have lost spiritual gas. We have parted vast with accumulations of self-conceit, self-confidence, and self-esteem, and instead of glorying in ourselves we begin to cry for mercy out of the very dust. I have known a child of God so big that he could hardly get inside the door of any ordinary meeting-house, and by the time that the Lord had given him a twist or two he was glad enough to creep into a mousehole, so long as he might be somewhere near the people of God. Sanctified affliction is a wonderfully diminishing process, and that is the way we grow: we grow by becoming less and less in our own esteem; and the Lord uses the furnace on purpose to this end—to take away fictitious grace. Some of our young friends on a sudden descend into the pit of despair, and we are very grieved for them; but it is the best thing that can happen to them, for when they find their feet again they will have learnt how to walk in a much more careful and godly manner than they did before. So you see that electing love uses the furnace to consume our dross.

The Lord uses the furnace also to prepare the soul for a more complete fashioning. The metal must be melted before it can be poured into the mould, and affliction is used by the Holy Ghost to melt the heart, to make it tender and pliable, and to fit it to receive the fashion and take the shape of the sacred mould into which heavenly wisdom delivers it.

Besides, affliction has much to do in loosening a Christian from this world, and this is a great and needful part of his education, seeing that he is not to be here long, and yet is as apt to cling to earth as if he would dwell here eternally. He is soon to be up and away to his estates on the hill tops, yet he clings to this poor earth, and would hug it yet more if it were not that the Lord makes it bitter to him. One said of old, "My soul is even as a weaned child." A great many might far more truly say, "My soul is even as a *weaning* child—very fretty and very wilful, but not at all ready to give up its childish delights." A

blessed thing it is when there has been enough furnace-work to make a man say, "I have done with the world. Now all my thoughts rise towards the world to come, for there my treasure is laid up."

My time flies so rapidly that I cannot stop long on any one branch of this very fruitful topic. There is no doubt that electing love does use the furnace as its workshop, and that there the vessels of mercy are made to receive many a line of beauty and mark of grace.

V. But now, fifthly, THE FURNACE IS A GREAT SCHOOL WHEREIN WE LEARN ELECTION ITSELF.

First, in the furnace we learn *the graciousness* of election. When a child of God in the time of trouble sees the corruption of his heart—the little hell, the perfect Sodom which reeks within his nature—he begins to say, "How can the Lord ever love me? If he has loved me, his affection must be traced to grace, free grace, sovereign grace, boundless grace, and nothing but grace." Now, that is a great thing to learn.

There, too, we learn *the holiness* of election, for while we lie suffering, a voice says, "God will not spare thee, because there is still sin in thee: he will cleanse thee from every false way." Then we see what a holy thing God's election is; how clean they must be who are to stand in his presence; how he would have his favourites loathe every sin; how God sees it better that his children should always smart than that they should sometimes sin. He will sooner make them bleed at every pore, than he will allow their hearts to go after their idols. What a holy thing election is, when it involves rebukes and chastisements in order to our perfecting.

Then, too, in the furnace we see what a *loving* thing election is, for never is God so loving to his people consciously as when they are in the flames of trouble. How tenderly he presses them to his bosom in their hour of grief. The mother always loves her child; but let that child be ill, let it pine away, let it become weaker and weaker, and you will see the mother's heart. She loves that child better than the others, because it needs more love. And when the Lord allows his dear children to grow poor, or to become distressed in mind or in body, then he lets out his heart to them; then will he show them his love in such choice and delicate ways as perhaps they never knew before.

It is at such times that God's people know *the power* of electing love. "Ah," cries the instructed believer, "I can see now how the decree of God preserves my soul alive. I am in the furnace, and if he had not kept me, the vehement heat would long ago have utterly consumed me." If you want to see what the power of God can do for a believer you must stand where Nebuchadnezzar stood, and look into the red mouth of the furnace. Those who threw in the holy children themselves perished by reason of the vehemence of the flames; so that there was no fancy about the fire, it was real and killing flame. Look steadily in—your eye can bear the gaze. You see three men walking. They were cast in bound, but they are walking loose. Three, did I say? There are four. There is a mystic stranger with them—one who wears a crown, brighter than all the crowns of earth—but who is he? "The fourth is like unto the Son of God." Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had never seen the Son of God so near them as when they trod the glowing coals. Is it not written, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of

affliction"? When thou goest through the fire thou shalt not be burned. The Lord's choice of thee shall be shown by his bearing thee company.

Ay, beloved, and it is at such times that *the sweetness* of God's electing love comes home to the Christian heart, for he joys and rejoices in his tribulation while he is conscious of the love of God. I would not change my estate—no, not in the furnace—with the bravest worldling that lives. When everything else is gone, if electing love remains, I am rich to all the intents of bliss; let me be sure of almighty love, and all the rest is not worth a thought.

So, beloved, you learn election in the furnace; and, though I do not desire any believer the slightest harm, but wish him every blessing, yet as to some of my Christian brethren who never go very far into the deep things of God, and are very cloudy about the doctrines of grace, and cannot, indeed, say "grace" without somehow stuttering "free will," I would to God that they had a little touch of the furnace for their eternal good. A scorch or two might do them good, and they might, perhaps, be better able to speak to the praise of the glory of that infinite eternal grace which chose the saints of old, and will not cast them away.

VI. Now, lastly, by the furnace SOME OF THE HIGHER ENDS OF A YET MORE SPECIAL ELECTION ARE OFTEN REVEALED, for there is not only an election of grace, but there is an election from among the elect to the highest position and to the noblest service. Jesus Christ had many choice disciples, but it is written, "I have chosen you twelve." Out of the twelve there were three—you know their names; and out of the three there was one, elect out of the elect—that loving, tender John, who leaned upon his Master's bosom.

The furnace has much to do with this, as a rule, since it usually attends and promotes the higher states of grace, and the wider ranges of usefulness. First with *the preacher* this truth is seen; affliction makes him eminent. I do not think that the preacher will long feed God's saints if he does not read in that volume which Luther said was one of the three best books in his library, namely, affliction. That book is printed in the black letter, but it has some wonderful illuminations in it, and he who would teach the people must often weep over its chapters. Men never bake bread so well as when the oven is well heated, nor do we prepare sermons so well as when the fire burns around us. When we have been in heaviness ourselves we are able to talk experimentally to the tried children of God. When the Lord means to train any one of his servants for eminent usefulness in the building up of his people, he passes him through the fire: edification comes of tribulation. So is it with *the Christian hero*, he could never lead the host if he had not been chastened of the Lord in secret places. Men who have stood in the front of the armies of God have been trained by adversity. Martin Luther—grand, brave man—have you ever read his private biography? He was a man so tempted and so tried, and so frequently the victim of depression of spirits and dire despondency, that he was often ready to die in despair. There were times when he did not know whether he had any part or lot in the glad tidings which he loved so well. Though he went on thundering out the gospel

for other people, he sometimes could get no comfort himself. Those awful conflicts of his with the devil were the means of confirming his spirit in his public controversies. How should he be afraid of the Pope, when he had faced the devil himself? He could not fear to go to Worms because of the devils on the housetops of which he spoke, for he had faced all the infernal legions in his own house and had overcome them. Look at Calvin, again, that mightiest master in Israel, clear, upright, and profound; he suffered daily under a list of diseases, any one of which would have made a constant invalid of a less courageous man; and, although always early in the morning at the cathedral, delivering his famous expositions which have enriched the Church of God, yet he always bore about with him a body full of anguish. Nor could England find a Wycliffe, nor Scotland a Knox, nor Switzerland a Zwingli, except it be where the refiner sits at the furnace door. It must be so. No sword is fit for our Lord's handling till it has been full oft annealed.

Well, as it is with the preachers and heroes, so it will be with us if we would rise. I would have you greatly aspire in holy things. Labour after a perfectly consecrated life. Abjure all selfishness, and live for the salvation of souls, and the glory of God: but remember that you will not reach it except by many a trial. Do you aspire to be Christly? I trust you do. But you never will be like Jesus if you never bear a cross. If your life is one of ease, can you be like to him who had not where to lay his head? If you never know a self-denial, if you never have a reproach heaped upon you; if no man ever calls you devil, or mad, if everything goes swimmingly with you, how can you know fellowship with the despised and rejected of men? God's true people are opposed by the current of the times, even as their Master was. Oh, yes, it will cost you many a sorrow, many a tear, if you are to follow your Master fully; but do not therefore, hesitate. Do you want to be heavenly? I know some that are already in a measure so. I could indicate some members of this church whose speech is savoured with eternity and glory: they cannot speak half-a-dozen sentences but their speech betrayeth them that they have been with Jesus. Mark well this fact—*they are tried people*; they are mostly sick people of whom I would dare to say that they are heavenly. We ought all to be so; but oh, my brethren, we are very little what we should be till we are put upon the anvil, and the Lord uses the hammer upon us. If he is doing that now with any of you, and you have crosses to bear, do not repine, but let the soft whisper of the text sustain you—"I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." There are tokens of consumption about you, dear sister: I see that hectic flush, but do not dread the future, for the Lord saith, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." You have struggled hard, my brother, to rise out of your situation; but as often as you have striven you have fallen back again with broken wing to your somewhat hard lot. Do not be despondent, but abide in your calling with contentment, since the the Lord hath said, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." Young man, you have been to college, and you were near taking your degree; but your health is failing you, and you will never become a renowned scholar, as you

hoped. Do not distress yourself because your part will be passive rather than active, for the Lord says, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." Merchant, your firm is going to pieces, you will be poor; but have faith in God. It is the Lord's will that you should go struggling through the rest of your life; but he says, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." Mother, you have lost three or four little ones, and there is another sickening, and you say, "I cannot bear it." Yes, you will bear it, for the Lord says, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." And art *thou* here, Hannah? Art thou here to-night, thou woman of a sorrowful spirit? Is thine adversary bitter of spirit toward thee? Are there those about thee that grieve thee and make thee fret? Weep no more, for the Lord loves thee when no one else does, and he says, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." Some of you are like ferns; you never flourish except in the damp and in the shade. Too much sunlight would not be good for you. Some plants need a marsh and a fog to develop them, and perhaps you are such. Perhaps your Master knows that if he put you where you would like to be it would be deadly to you and therefore he writes, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction."

Now, I take my leave of you all by a morsel of personal experience. My Lord met me to-night, and said, "I have chosen *thee* in the furnace of affliction," and I endeavoured to reply to him, "My Lord, inasmuch as thou dost graciously condescend to say 'I have chosen thee,' I leave the rest of the sentence entirely to thy will, and ask not whether it be in the furnace or out of it. Choose me, and then choose everything for me. If thou chooseth the furnace I would choose the furnace too."

Remember the good woman who, when they said to her, because she was very ill, "Would you rather live or die?" replied, "I would rather God's will were done." "Oh," said they, "but if God would let it be just as you wish, which should it be?" She replied, "If the Lord were to leave it to my will, I would beg him to be so good as to let it be his will, and not mine." O, beloved, pray "*Not as I will.*" Grief is almost ended when self is slain. Sorrow well nigh ceases to be sorrow when you take the sting of self out of it.

The Lord be with you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm lvi.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—746, "Art thou weary"
(109, "Flowers and Fruits of Sacred Song"), 748.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE MESSAGE FROM THE LORD'S MOUTH.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 1ST, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel : therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me."—Ezekiel iii. 17.

IN most places the seasons in the church are the reverse of those of nature. Our wintry season generally comes when our hearers are busy in the fields, or resting in their summer retreats, and our harvest time for the ingathering of souls comes to us in the winter, when during the long evenings the people can come together, and special meetings for prayer and exhortation can be held. Just now, as the damps of autumn begin to fall and the days are sensibly shortening, we ought to take note of the signs of the times, and begin sharpening our sickles for a plenteous harvest. The time when kings go forth to battle is coming on, and we must muster the host. The season when we can with special ease gather the people, and hopefully labour for their conversion, is now at our doors, and it is well that we gird up our loins for it. I feel deeply anxious, dear friends, that every time these seasons come round all Christians should be fully prepared for them, that we should make the best of every opportunity, and use with thorough-heartedness every hopeful occasion, if by any means we may save some. Now is our time to use all our powers that we may be the means of bringing glory to our Lord Jesus Christ, and of setting him on high in hearts conquered by his love.

We would all desire to take some part in this gracious work. Of course there are, and always will be, in the Christian church, special watchmen : chosen men are set apart by God for the warning of the people, whose one business it is to cry aloud and spare not, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. Let us be thankful that the Lord gives us such men, and let us beseech him to multiply their number. We prayerfully expect still to have our Ezeekiels, to whom the Lord shall say, "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman"; but still, beloved, when the camp is in imminent danger every man should turn watchman ; and though the special sentinels must keep their posts, and walk their

beats, and must with double vigilance act as if everything depended upon them, yet all the rest of the host must mount guard also, and aid in keeping the watches both by day and night. It seems to me, brother, that if the Lord has opened thine eyes thou hast become a seer, and when thou hast become a seer, and canst see, thou shouldst also become a watchman, and watch for the good of the church of God, and for the salvation of souls. If this country were invaded, which may God grant it never may be, we could not confine the defence to our professional soldiers. No, every man would grasp such weapon as he could reach, and use it vigorously to drive the intruder over our white cliffs; I might even venture to say every woman would do the same, and matrons would become Amazons. Dear are our hearths and homes, and none of us would ask to be excused the defence of our beloved isle. Even so in the work of the salvation of souls, every saved one longs to have a share. Can we let sinners perish? Can we permit our own kinsmen to go down into the pit? No, not if our prayers, and tears, and earnest teachings can rescue them. Jesus Christ in mighty love has died to save sinners, and he must be honoured for his glorious deed of grace,—can we suffer his name to be trailed in the mire? Shall he still be despised and rejected by human hearts? Shall even the members of our own family refuse his gentle sway? No, not if our testimony may help to honour him; nor if our earnest pleadings may gain him a throne in some one human heart.

We feel glad to think that Christ's battles are not such as require strength of muscle and bone, nor do they need great mental capacity. Even the appointed watchman is set only to *warn* the people: he has not to charm them with eloquence, nor to electrify them with novelties of oratory: he is simply to warn them, and the plainest language may suffice for that. Surely it is a grave mistake of the present period that men think their preachers are bound to be oratorical and poetical. Why is such startling ability to be flaunted if the object is to warn a sinner to flee from the wrath to come? I fear that my brethren are forgetting their real errand, and are labouring to dazzle those whom the Lord sent them to warn. If a man is asleep, and I have to wake him, I need not cultivate a fine tenor voice with which to sing him out of his slumbers; I have but to call with sufficient loudness and distinctness until he is startled. I am glad that you Christian people can all take a share in the service of your Master, since that service is the warning of those around you. You will never deliver sensational discourses, and I am sure you need not regret the inability; but you can give men warning from God. You can warn children, your own children to begin with; you can warn your neighbours, you can warn those of your own rank and age; you can warn all who come in your way, for that is simply to tell of danger, and to recommend the way of escape. Brethren, with but slender knowledge and stammering utterance, we can warn and we will.

I am going to address you this morning upon the supposition that all of you who are believers in Christ are panting to take a share in the necessary and earnest work of warning men, lest they come to destruction. May I not hope that this is the case? To me it seems as if there is nothing else worth living for. It cannot be worth while to linger in this land of sorrow and of toil unless God is to be glorified by us; nothing but the

accomplishment of his gracious purposes can compensate us for our exile from heaven. No merely earthly object is worthy of an immortal spirit. If we could win the Indies? What is wealth? If we could compel the trumpet of fame to engross itself with our exploits? What is honour? There is nothing beneath the moon worth a man's lifting his hand for, except the glory of God; and God is best glorified by the conversion of men. You believe *that*, my brethren, and therefore you mean to have a share in it, if it be but the bringing of one poor child to Christ; therefore to you I speak with confidence, hoping that God may bless my words, so that we may begin a new campaign right well prepared for it, and so may achieve a greater success than any we have hitherto gained.

What are the qualifications for serving God by warning men? Ezekiel had them. What can we learn from the Lord's words to Ezekiel by which we may the better serve our Lord and act as watchmen to those around us?

Three things I shall speak of this morning: first, *the ear to be disciplined*: secondly, *the tongue to be educated*: thirdly, *a lesson in the text to be practised*. May the Holy Spirit bless the whole subject to us.

I. If we would be found really useful and serviceable for our Lord and Master, **THE EAR IS TO BE DISCIPLINED**. Read the text. "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore *hear the word at my mouth*." To train the tongue you must begin with the ear. It is well known that no man is fit to command who has not first learned to obey, and assuredly no man is qualified to teach who has not first of all found pleasure in learning. Thou must be a disciple and sit at the Master's feet ere thou canst become an apostle and go forth to speak in the Master's name. To acquire eloquence we must train the ear, and especially to warn our fellow men we must ourselves hear the voice of warning. The text says, "*Hear the word at my mouth*." What does this mean? I take it, first, that if we wish to be useful our ear must be disciplined *to hear only God's word*. We must receive the gospel as God's own word, and go forth to proclaim it as such. I have lately met pretty frequently with the following sentiment; it is one of the fungi of this enlightened age of advanced thought—"The call is every day more loud for teaching which shall not appeal to the authority of the Bible, but to the decision of the hearts and consciences of men. Our religious teachers should fall back upon the truth which men have gathered from their inner consciousness, and should support their instructions by arguments fetched from the experience of the thoughtful and philosophical. It is too late in the day to be always referring to a book and attempting to prove certain statements by the stereotyped utterances of an antiquated volume." That is the favourite notion, and those who believe in it may go on and dote and dream as much as they please, and those who think their excogitations worth listening to may listen to them: they will, no doubt, greatly please themselves, and they will for awhile amuse the little coteries who look up to them as little popes of a little party. They may even worship them as little gods, for surely the creator and maker of truth within himself falls not very short of deity. Brethren, we can afford to let this plague of flies pass away; the nuisance is great, but it will not long endure. There will come an end of all

this trifling. Man's imaginings and reasonings are wood, hay, stubble, and the day cometh which will consume them. Vainglorious mortals would supplant the eternal testimony with their maunderings, but this their way is their folly. Our assurance is that the teaching which is wanted for this age must come more and more distinctly from the Book, and must court daily testing by the Book. Teachers if they are to have power must sustain everything with "thus saith the Lord." Ours it is to stand or fall by revelation, and to declare "We do not care one single farthing about your imaginary consciousness and the manufacturings of your dreams, your fancies, and your whims; we declare to you that God hath spoken, and that what he has said you are bound to receive, because the Lord hath said it." This stands instead of all arguments, "the Lord hath said it." Believe him, for he cannot lie. We come to tell you of what we ourselves have received upon divine authority, and we claim that you do receive our testimony, not because it is ours, but because it is supported by divine authority, and is in fact the echo of the divine word. Only by this mode of utterance can we hope to succeed. On any other footing we court failure and deserve it. Brother, dost thou say, "I desire to spread my religion, because it is my own opinion"? Thou wilt never win anyone on such terms; how canst thou expect it? Thy warning of another man, apart from God's truth, will be of no use to him, for thy opinion is as good as his, and his opinion is as good as thine, and neither is worth much. Brother, dost thou say, "I regard my religion as my own views of things"? Ah, then, your views of things, and my views of things, and everybody else's views of things are worth little enough, and there is no use in making a stir about them. Any opinion which bears your name at the bottom, or mine, might just as well not be written. What are our names? What are our views? No, brother, if thou wouldst speak so as to affect the heart and conscience and destiny of men, thou must repeat what thou hast received from God's own mouth, as God's own word: there is a value about that, a fixedness, a certainty about that, and it goes forth with a supreme majesty, involving woe upon any who dare reject it: hence its power. If it be indeed the word of God, woe unto you if you do not speak it faithfully, and woe unto your hearers if they receive it not reverently. The very first thing, then, for us to remember, if we would be useful in warning men and saving souls, is, that we feel the full conviction and impression that what we try to teach is God's own word. "Thou shalt hear the word from my mouth." We must feel it to be clothed with the imperial robe of divine authority. We are not going to speak it because it is the doctrine authorized by the creed, nor because it is the doctrine of the community to which we belong, but because it is the sure word of the living God. Here is power,—power which hard hearts are forced to feel, power before which even devils tremble. I warrant thee if thou put God's word down among fifty thousand words of men it shall be like a lion among a flock of sheep, tearing them in pieces, and it will prove by its own natural force whence it cometh and whither it goeth.

Secondly, if we would have our ear educated, it must be not only to receive the word as of divine authority, but *to know what God's word is*. Beloved, there be many who are willing to begin winning souls who had better first commence learning Christ. "Go ye into all the world and

preach the gospel to every creature" was spoken to men who had been for some time with Jesus, and had learned of him. For others who were to be called it was provided that after baptism they should be taught, that in due season they also might go forth to instruct the nations. I like not that a man should become so much a learner that he never wishes to speak and to teach others, but I like as little that a man should be so anxious to be a teacher that he runs before he is sent, and tries to bring others to a Saviour of whom he knows next to nothing. Fill thyself, brother, before thou askest to be poured out, else there will not much come of thine outpouring. Receive the bread and the fish from the Master, else thou wilt have very little to distribute among the crowd. First of all get thou to know what it is thou hast to say, or else how canst thou speak for God? If a messenger run swiftly and cometh out of breath to the end of his journey, and then saith, I have somewhat to say for my master, but I know not what it is, he will be laughed at for his pains. His swift running is of little consequence, seeing he had nothing to carry. He should have waited till he knew the tidings which he had to bring. Brother, hear the word from God's mouth, and then deliver it in God's name.

What, then, shall we do? Let us study the Bible with diligence. Go to that fountain of truth, I pray you, and never be satisfied with a second-hand version of it. Go you to the fountain head and drink there or ever the streams have been muddled by human blundering. We desire to keep the word pure, but we are conscious of infirmity; go you to the undefiled well, where there is no admixture of human error. Search the inspired book and desire to know everything which it teaches, for a little error may do much mischief to good teaching, like the fly in the pot of ointment. Even the omission of a truth may injure a man's usefulness to a very great extent. The Lord does not bless some churches as we would expect them to be blessed, because they are in grievous error upon certain points; and, though he will bless that part of the testimony which is true, yet the other portion hinders. Probably one reason why Christianity does not spread so rapidly just now as it once did is this—that it is so mixed up in most denominations with human tradition and opinion, and because, also, there is so little willingness to examine doubtful points to see whether or no they are according to the mind of God. The church would be one with itself if it were one with the truth. It would be impossible that there should be so many divisions if we all held to the one Lord, one faith, one baptism; but there are sad admixtures which are allowed to go on from year to year unchallenged, and if any man be honest enough to speak out he is straightway charged with bigotry and uncharitableness. While these things are so the blessing will be restrained.

My dear brother, if you would be eminently useful, let your mind bow before the doctrine of the Scriptures. Seek to know all that the Bible teaches, especially upon the main points of salvation, and yield yourself to the mind of Christ in all things. Desire to tell your fellow-men just what the Lord tells you, no more and no less; and endeavour throughout your whole life to follow after revealed truth in its purity, rather than the dogmas of the fathers or the decrees of the sects. The truth as it is in Jesus, pure and simple as we find it in the word, should be our rule and guide. This will greatly help us towards success. It does not look

a very practical remark, but it is so. The Holy Spirit first gives the truth to our understandings, and then gives us grace to impart it to others. Get thine ear cleansed, thoroughly cleansed, to hear God's word as God's word, and be determined to know thoroughly what God's word hath really taught; thus shalt thou be instructed to speak as God's mouth to men.

The great thing, I believe, with a successful winner of souls is to *hear God's truth from God's own mouth*. What mean I by this? I mean that a second-hand message is sure to be weakly delivered. A brother repeats a story which somebody else has told to him! how cold it gets in passing from hand to hand: he who first saw the fact told it with far more life and energy. What thou needest to do, brother, is to tell the message as God himself has told it to thee by his Holy Spirit. See how Ezekiel was prepared to prophesy. He says, "The hand of the Lord was there upon me; and he said unto me, Arise, go forth into the plain, and I will there talk with thee." Yes, we must get alone with God and hear what he will speak, for only so can we fitly be his mouth to others. Do you want to know Christ's way of making men useful? Turn to Mark iii. 13—15, and read, "He goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would; and they came unto him. And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils." Do you see the order? He calls them to him,—you must not dream of winning souls till you first come to Christ yourself. Next we read, "That they might be with him,"—you cannot go and teach Christ, or bring others to him, unless you have first been with him. Communion with Jesus is training for service. To abide with your Lord must be your college, and your preparation class for teaching others. After the fellowship comes the work—"That he might send them forth to preach, and to have power." The process requires that the man who is to have power for Christ must first be with Christ. He cannot work miracles till he has dwelt with the great miracle-worker.

"Thou shalt hear the word *at my mouth*." There lies the word in the book. What infinite majesty is there! As I read each letter in that Book of God I worship the eternal mind which dictated it; but oh, when the passage of Scripture leaps out of the book and enters into my soul, by the divine flame of the Holy Spirit, how much more mighty it appears. When my inner ear hears God speak the text, what energy there is about it. Sitting down with the Bible on my knee, I say to myself, "This is no common book which lies before me: there is an inspiration here, not the inspiration of Milton or of Shakspeare, but divine inspiration; this is the language of the Eternal, as truly so as though I now saw Sinai on a blaze, and heard out of the thick darkness these accents ringing with trumpet tones, and with the deep thunder of 'Thus saith the Lord.'" When we thus consider we are in a right mood to hear the Lord's word, and to speak it to others. We must own and feel the majesty of the gospel, and be conscious of its power, or we shall not rightly warn men. Brethren, since this book is God's word to your own souls, take care that you deliver it in deep reverence and holy awe to those whom you aim to instruct. Is it not the voice of God to you? When it speaks home to your heart, does it not move you as nothing

else can do. I confess that the words of Scripture thrill my soul as nothing else ever can; they bear me aloft or dash me down, they tear me in pieces or they build me up after an unrivalled fashion. The words of God have more power over me than ever David's fingers had over his harp strings. Is it not so with you? Well, you will speak to others with power in proportion as you continually feel the power of the word over your own heart and conscience.

This is very wonderful this hearing the truth newly spoken from the Lord's mouth. Some will not know what I mean, but others of you will. The Holy Ghost has a way of showing unto us the old texts in a new light, and applying them with new force, and this is what we greatly need.

"Thou shalt hear the word at my mouth." I would like you teachers this afternoon, before you go to your classes, to go up stairs and say, "Good Master, let us hear what we have to tell the children; let us hear it in our souls as from thyself. We are going to warn and instruct and invite them; be pleased to show us how. Master, say the words to us. Make us to hear thy voice, and when we have heard thy message from thine own lips we shall talk to the children in quite another style from that which is usual to us." Brethren, in spirit maintain your fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, and so will you warn souls with warm, loving admonitions which God will bless. Let us have done with second-hand messages; speak as the oracles of God.

Once more, to have our ear well tutored *we must feel the force of the truth that we deliver*. Ezekiel had to eat the roll; it must enter into himself before he could reveal its contents to the people. So we must feel the force and power of the gospel before we can effectually declare it. Sin,—are you going to talk about the evil of it? Do you know the evil of it for yourself? Get back to the place of repentance where you once wet the earth with your tears, and talk to children or grown-up people about sin in that spirit. Pardon,—are you going to speak about that? Do you know the sweetness of it. Go to the place where first you saw the flowing of the ever precious blood, and feel again your load of guilt removed, and you will speak of it most sweetly. The power of the Holy Spirit,—are you going to speak about that? Have *you* felt his quickening, enlightening, comforting, and sanctifying influence? Then according as you have felt you will be able to speak with effect. It is poor work to preach a Christ you never knew. It is terrible to talk of bread you have never tasted, of living water you never drank, and of joys you never felt. The husbandman that laboureth must first be a partaker of the fruits. Go home, and ask the Lord to teach thee, but go not thou on his errands till first thou hast sat at his feet, for unto those whom he has not taught, God saith, "What hast thou to do that thou shouldst declare my statutes? First come and hear the word at my mouth, and then give the people warning from me." I think I have said enough to show how the ear is to be disciplined.

II. Secondly, THE TONGUE IS TO BE EDUCATED. That is indeed the aim of the discipline of the ear. And to what end is the tongue educated? I answer, first, to be able *to deliver an unpleasant message*. Any man's tongue is swift in telling good things; at least it ought to be,

or else where is humanity? We are glad enough to tell you glad tidings of good things, but he that is to be useful must be willing to speak unpleasant things. Brothers and sisters, are you ready when you meet with careless people to tell them truths that will be unpalatable to them; and when they are awakened are you willing in God's name to try and beat to pieces their refuges of lies, to tell them plainly of the mistakes that they are so fond of, and point them to the only way of salvation? You and I cannot be useful if we want to be sweet as honey in the mouths of men. God will never bless us if we wish to please men, that they may think well of us. Are you willing to tell them what will break your own heart in the telling and break theirs in the hearing? If not, you are not fit to serve the Lord. You must be willing to go and speak for God, though you will be rejected. See the seventh verse, where God says, "They will not hearken unto thee, for they will not hearken unto me." If they reject the Master, will they receive the servant? They took up stones to stone your own dear Lord and Master, and at last took nails to fasten him to the cross. Do you think they will listen to you? If God is to bless you, dear friend, you must be willing to bear witness for him even if none should ever believe a word you say, because in so doing you will deliver your soul. Take good heed, all of you, to this danger of being guilty of the blood of others. Have not some of you quite forgotten it? There is blood on your skirts! Do you see the spots? Some of you who never said a word for Christ to your own children, I say there are big drops of soul-blood on your garments. Soul-blood is worse than the blood of the body, and you are besmeared with it. See you not the spots? Wash them out, I pray you. Oh, you say, it is of no use warning them, they would laugh at you: but you would lose the blood-stains if you did. Their blood would not be required at your hands, therefore if you want to be useful be willing to do unpleasant duties in order to feel, "I have warned them and cleared my soul."

Next, you want your tongue tutored *to speak the truth as having yourself heard it*. You know there are several ways of speaking. I was trying to illustrate differences of speaking when addressing my students the other day. I said, "Suppose you saw by the look of my face, while I was sitting here, that I was in a terrible state of indignation when I rose to address you, you would say, 'Now we shall have it; we can see by the look of him that he will drive at us.'" Just so when a man preaches, or warns others, it ought to be in a living style which indicates that something is coming. The man should be full of emotion, not moved by anger, but by a sacred passion which arouses him and makes the people feel that he is in awful earnest, carried out of himself, not delivering set phrases and words from his mouth outwards, but speaking from his inmost heart. Now, if we were to meet with our Lord Jesus himself, and were then to speak of him in the state of mind in which his presence left us, what a style of speech that would be. I think I hear a mother, who has been with Jesus, talking to her girl. She says, "Dear child, there is such joy in loving Jesus that I pant for you to know it. He is so great and good that my dear little daughter must not forget him." I can imagine that a father has met with the Lord Jesus, and felt God's truth sent into his own soul by the Holy Ghost, and I am sure that when he gets his boy alone he pleads with him

in deep and tender earnestness, which commands the boy's ear and heart. He does not know what has happened to his father; he is so earnest, and pleads so seriously, but the secret reason is that the father has listened to the Lord himself, and is himself the echo of that voice. Facts vividly brought before the mind greatly influence a speaker. A sinner seen as lost touches the heart. Jesus seen as crucified affects the speech. If I were to stand up in the council of a certain town to urge them to look to their fire escapes, I should do it with tremendous vehemence if I had just come out of the midst of that shuddering crowd which saw a poor woman hanging out of the window in the midst of the flames for lack of proper apparatus to reach her. Any man fresh from such a sight would plead with energy, his whole soul would burn as he thought of the poor perishing fellow-creature in the midst of the fire. Would not yours? It is just so when you come fresh from talking with God; the truth is vividly realized, an awe is upon you, holy zeal and sacred ardour inflame your breast. If you dwell away from God you do not feel the value of the gospel message, nor the weight of men's souls. The grandest of all truths lose force when they cease to be realized facts, but their power returns when we come again under their actual influence. When the voice of Jesus' love is still ringing in your ears, then with a deep awe-struck solemnity your whole soul is poured forth at your mouth, and you speak as pleading with men that they would yield to God and accept his great salvation. The tongue *must* speak when the ear is tingling with the message of the Lord.

The tongue needs to be trained in the case of each one of us *to deliver the message as from God*. I do believe that God hath given commission to every Christian who knows the truth to tell it, and that there is authority given to every man who hath the living water within himself to let it flow out, for it is written, "Out of the midst of him shall flow rivers of living water." You see your calling, brethren. You may not all be called to the work of prophesying as ministers are, but you are all called by some means to warn men of the wrath to come and lead them to Christ, and I want you to feel that God is at the back of you when you warn sinners. You never pray for a soul, you never weep over a soul, you never drop one kernel of divine truth into a human ear, you never utter one word of warning or exhortation, but what God is with you in so doing. God will own his truth, therefore never be ashamed of it. Make your face like adamant if their hearts are like adamant; if they are not ashamed to sin do not you be ashamed to warn them; if they are not ashamed of their unbelief, be not you ashamed of your faith in the divine testimony. The hosts of heaven are on your side, therefore be not dismayed. Your faith may hear the noise of the wings of the living creatures, and the noise of the wheels, and the noise of a great rushing, for all heaven is astir when the watchman moves to warn the people (Ezekiel iii. 13). If God be at the back of you speak boldly, and do not let your testimony be silenced.

The Lord tells Ezekiel that the people would be a restraint to him, and how often they are so. Non-success often ties the preacher up so that he can scarcely speak. "Thou, O Son of Man, behold they shall put bands upon thee, and shall bind thee with them, and thou shalt not go out among them." But what a grand verse is the twenty-seventh: "But

when I speak with thee, I will open thy mouth, and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; He that heareth, let him hear; and he that forbeareth, let him forbear: for they are a rebellious house." None can silence a mouth which God has opened.

May we henceforth feel that now, between here and heaven, we have souls committed to our charge, and that we will be clear of their blood. Each one of you has his little plot of ground to sow, you must resolve that it shall not lie waste. You will be called home very soon, my dear fellow-workers, therefore work while it is day. I who have to lead you in this husbandry may soon be called away. I feel it, and I feel that the same is true of each one of us; therefore, since these poor souls are dying as well as we are, and they are sinking into hell for ever, do let us be in earnest, and may God help us to save them. Let us begin to weep, for weeping, perhaps, may be the fittest beginning of a higher life, as it was the beginning of our natural life. Let us cry unto God; let us watch for opportunities, and as they come let us avail ourselves of them, if by any means we may save some. We dare no longer fritter away life. Dare we? We dare not furnish a continuation of man's foolish history, it, indeed, it be true that "all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." We do not believe that statement, and if it be true we will alter it. Let us upset the stage, tear off the masks, and truly live. "Life is real, life is earnest," as we shall know at the judgment seat of God. How real will it look by the light of the last great day. Come, let us ask to have ear and tongue trained, and let us begin now to serve our Lord by warning our fellow men.

III. I finish my sermon this morning by, in the third place, endeavouring to practise THE LESSON OF THE TEXT. I desire to speak to those of you who are unconverted, and to speak as if I had just come from an interview with my Lord and Master, as I trust I have. I want to speak as if I had just heard him say what I am going to repeat to you. Try and help me with your imagination; and may God give you faith.

I have to say to you, dear friends now present, that whatever may be your natural excellence of character, and whatever the religiousness of your training, yet you must all of you be born again. You heard me say, "Ye must be born again;" but I want to say it as Jesus said it when one evening he was visited by a ruler of the Jews, a man of spotless character, of admirable reputation and of deep learning. Sitting alone with him, our Lord treated him with great kindness, but yet with solemn emphasis he said, "Ye must be born again." Yes, young friend, there is much about you that is very admirable, and you know a great deal of divine truth, but "Ye must be born again." The Master would lay a strong tender emphasis upon the "*must*." "*Ye must be born again.*" Jesus would not demand of us more than is absolutely necessary, nor say a syllable that would tend to shut a soul out of heaven. If he says, "Ye must," why then we must. I want you to own that necessity.

Next I desire to introduce you to Jesus sitting at the well with the woman of Samaria. You can see the smile upon his countenance as he instructs her. I want you now to hear him say these words: "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." I should like to say to you, dear friend, that all the outward forms of religion in the world will be of no value to you unless you are

spiritual. You must have a spiritual mind and a spiritual nature through being born again : and then you must worship God in a spiritual way, for mere outward religion is nothing in his sight. I desire to warn you as to that fact, but I would rather you should hear my Master say, "the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him." You believe it, do you not? Oh, ask that the Spirit of God would teach you how to worship in spirit and in truth.

Now listen to my Master again. He is addressing the Jews, and he uses these words. I give them accurately translated—"Ye search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life : and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." I am glad that you read your Bibles, but how is it that you feel so easy when you have read your chapter every day? Do you think you will get salvation by Bible reading? Alas, you are in error. You must go further than that; you must go to Christ Jesus himself. Oh, that you would by an act of faith come to him this morning. Do you think this truth hard? I hope you do not, for it is the teaching of Jesus, and I have heard him say it to my own soul. You must come to Jesus himself, or the Scriptures will do you no good. The Scriptures are a hand-post pointing to Christ; it will never do to sit down by the hand-post, but we must hasten on to find the Lord himself.

Listen to my Master once again. He says to the Jews "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." I know you will say that I speak hard things. Perhaps I do, but not with a hard heart. Now, my Lord is always tender, never man spake like this man, and never man wept as he did when he had a hard thing to say; hear ye then his declaration, "Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." "*Die in your sins.*" Do you know what that means? To die in irons, to die in a ditch, to die on the gallows—these are nothing compared with dying in your sins!

I must tell you some other things which my Master says, because nowadays the fine new theologians do not like to have them spoken. I have heard him speak them in my very soul, and I must therefore warn you of them. He says there are tares growing among the wheat, and that the day will come when the angels will "gather the tares in bundles to burn them." That is how he puts the destiny of the ungodly. Hear how the modern divines hiss between their teeth, "Dreadful language. These horrible expressions are borrowed from Dante and Milton, and the old writers." No : Dante, Milton, and the old writers had not existed then, but Jesus himself says, "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity ; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire : there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Such will be the lot of some of you, except you repent. Though growing up among Christian people, and hearing the gospel, and looking very like Christians, you will be separated from amongst the wheat to be cast into the fire.

Some of you are rich, and enjoy yourselves a great deal. I must tell you what Jesus said of one who fared sumptuously every day, but cared not for his soul. He said, "The rich man also died, and was buried ; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham

afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." My Lord, my sweet Lord, my dying, my bleeding Lord, the man who receives sinners, it was thus *he* spake. I would not speak less tenderly than he if I were able, but I want to assure you rich people who have your comforts in this life, and yet are out of Christ, that this is what will happen to you. Nor will this be for a time, but for ever. You will never be able to escape from torment according to my Master's teaching, for he says there is a great gulf fixed, so that they who would come from thence cannot. I pray you, therefore, take warning, as I would give you warning from his mouth.

The last thing that was ever seen of my Lord and Master upon earth was this. He stood on tiptoe on this world which had treated him so ill, and around him were gathered a few disciples. Just before he rose out of their sight he addressed them in loving tones, and said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." They stood with their ears and eyes open to know how he would have them put the gospel, and he said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." Did *he* say *that*? Yes, just before the cloud received him out of their sight, he said, "*He that believeth not shall be damned.*" It was *he* that said it. I should have liked to have seen how he looked when he thus spake—the evident pain which crossed his mind and showed itself in his eyes as he said in effect, "There will be some who will not believe, but you must tell *them* plainly, he that believeth not shall be damned." I do warn you of this, men and women, every one of you: if I am not a believer in Christ I shall be damned, and if you are not believers you will be damned. I do beseech you run not so dreadful a risk. Trust yourselves with Jesus now and you shall be saved, for it is he that says it and not I,—"*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*"; and again, "*He that believeth in him hath everlasting life.*" I do not think he meant me to try and put this in any pretty shape in order to amuse you with it, and I have not tried to do so. I have spoken to you right straight his own word as best I know it. May he be pleased to riddle out my frailties and throw them away, but may all that is his own live in your souls and mine unto eternal life. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Ezekiel ii. 9, 10; iii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—63, 507, 972.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

DIVINE INTERPOSITIONS.

A Sermon

Suggested by the loss of the "Princess Alice,"

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 8TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters."—Psalm xviii. 16.

I DO not know how you feel, my brethren, at this time, but as for myself, a heavy cloud seems to hang over me all the day. The overwhelming calamity of last Tuesday, so crushing and so far reaching, of which we must have spoken to each other, I suppose, every hour during the past week, cannot be removed from the thoughts of our minds or from the affections of our hearts. The whole of London may well be likened to that ancient city of which we read—"The city Shushan was perplexed." Every man has been asking his fellow, "Have you lost a friend?" and no man wonders when the answer is, "Alas, I have been sorely bereaved." In our own immediate circle we have borne a special share of the grief, for five, at least, of those who are in church membership with us have been removed from our midst, and we can scarcely speak with any of our brethren without discovering that they have lost some connection or friend. Alas, that unhappy vessel has sunk with a more precious freight than ever loaded Spanish galleon, and her wreck has brought a greater loss to our city than if she had carried untold gold. We cannot help thinking of this dire affliction, and, therefore, we had better think of it with some practical purpose.

I believe that this sudden grief comes, like every other event, from God, and comes as a voice from God to this our city—a voice which, we trust, will be heard and regarded. "The Lord's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." We are of the mind of that old prophet who said, "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos iii. 6.) Cometh there anything in the form of calamity upon the sons of men without the permission, control,
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and overruling of the Lord? Assuredly not. "The Lord killeth and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up." I know that many minds are so stunned by this tremendous blow, that they can hardly think of God in connection with it, and half wish to believe that the Omnipresent was not there. The problem staggers their reason, and they are unable to leave it among the mysteries of faith. As yet they have not gained the confidence of Job, who denied that affliction cometh out of the dust, but attributed it to the Lord, saying, "He taketh away: who can hinder him?" Even some who love the Lord, and trust him, are somewhat of the mind of Mary and Martha when they said, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died"; while others who should know better would timidly conceal their belief in an overruling providence, lest the ribald world should scoff at them. Let them scoff, I say; for our God is none the less glorious because his ways are far above and out of our sight. It is an atheistical thought which would put God out of any place; if he be not everywhere, he is nowhere; omnipresence is an essential of Godhead. If his hand ruleth not over evil it is not omnipotent, and thus again it lacks another essential attribute of deity. It would be dreadful to suppose him to have a limited dominion: "His kingdom ruleth over all."

We are not as those who believe in two co-existent forces, each supreme, one of whom shall create disasters, and the other shall distribute blessings. The prince of evil is, according to our faith, subordinate to the great Lord of all. Thus saith Jehovah, by the mouth of his servant Isaiah, "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and I create evil: I the Lord do all these things." He reigneth in the calm summer's day, and gives us the precious fruits of harvest, but he is equally present and regnant in the hurricane which destroys, or the blight which desolates. His providence speeds the ship to its desired haven, but it is equally his providence which sinks the barque and its mariners to the bottom of the sea. It is his power which looses the bands of Orion and binds the sweet influence of the Pleiades; his are the lightnings as well as the sunbeams, the thunderbolts as well as the raindrops. He is able to make the heaven as iron and the earth as brass, so that our land shall not yield her increase; he can call for a famine and break the whole staff of bread; for famine, pestilence, and war are as rods in his hand. Everywhere is God, and in all things his hand is present: in the things which seem to us to be evil as well as in the events which appear to us to be good, God is at work. He doeth no wrong, for God is not tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man, but we speak of physical evil, which causeth sorrow, pain, and death among men, and we say that certainly God is there. If not a sparrow falleth to the ground without our Father, we are sure that no great calamity can befall us apart from him. He is not far from us in our deepest sorrow, and however we may trace a calamity to the carelessness or the mistake of men, these are but the second causes, and we see behind all mere detail the permit of the Lord. If it were not so, mourners would be deprived of the greatest reason for submission, and the surest source of consolation.

Even where a terrible event is the result of crime God is not excluded. He shares not the guilt, but he overrules the act. Think of the crucifixion of our Lord, and remember that though the sin of it lay heavy

upon those who perpetrated it, yet the grand design of it was God's. Read Peter's words in the Acts: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Who shall deny that God was at Calvary, though sin there reached its culminating point?

We freely admit that we do not understand this, and therefore we do not attempt to explain it; but we believe and adore. Happily, we need not attempt to justify the ways of God to man, for he asks no defence at our hands, and deigns not to give any account of his matters: this only is our resolve, "Though he slay me yet will I trust in him."

Now, the question which has very naturally suggested itself to many is this,—If there be a providence, why does it permit these terrible evils? It is dreadful that human life should be lost on such a scale: God is omnipotent, nobody doubts that; why, then, does he not interfere to save? That shall suggest to us the first point of our discourse this morning, that *miraculous interpositions in the affairs of this life are not to be expected*, and we may not hope literally to use the words of our text and say, "He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters." Still, secondly, we shall note that, according to our text, *providential interpositions of another kind are vouchsafed*; and thirdly, and best of all, *gracious interpositions are given for the salvation of men*. What though the Lord doth not nowadays send from above, and take his servants, and draw them by miracle out of the waters of the river, yet doth he uplift us from the depths of trouble, and especially doth he upbear us from the depths of sin to our eternal salvation, for thus saith the Lord, "I will bring again from Babel, I will bring my people from the depths of the sea."

I. First, then, MIRACULOUS INTERPOSITIONS IN THE CALAMITIES OF THIS LIFE ARE NOT TO BE EXPECTED. I am not standing here as an advocate for God to defend his character because he does not thus interpose, for to objectors his sole answer is, "Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" If you will accuse your Maker he will not care to answer you. You who have forged the accusation may fashion an answer, if it seem good unto you. Yet there is a difficulty which none can deny, and that difficulty lies in a fact. Why is there any evil at all, seeing that the good God is almighty, and sits upon the throne? This is the old puzzle which none can answer. The negro put it in a very natural form when he asked the missionary, if God be so much stronger than the devil, why does he not kill the devil and make an end of his mischief? Just so: that is the top and bottom of the matter. There is the question, but who can answer it? A fool may raise in an hour more objections than the wisest man could remove in a century. Now, the cleverest theory will not alter facts. What you and I may think is a very small matter compared with what really is, and it is quite certain that there is moral evil in the world, and that there is also a God; that there is physical evil in the world, and yet love is supreme; and that the Almighty permits fire and water to destroy his creatures, and does not interpose to rescue them, and yet he is full of tenderness and pity. There be some of course who will dare to condemn their Maker, and call him by I
what horrible names. I have even heard such a word as
himself from between proud lips. Again I say it is not worth

our while to answer such objectors, because such persons are not pervious to explanation, nor willing to receive it; and then again, it is a small matter to the Most High what such persons may think of him. He doeth as he pleases and asks no leave from his creatures.

But now just for a minute let us consider the question which we trust is modestly proposed. Suppose that every time a great danger threatened we might expect a miraculous interposition from heaven, what then? The supposition is not absurd, for there might be such an interposition: we must admit the possibility since God is almighty. The train is thundering along the iron way, it will dash into another, and many lives will be destroyed, but if the Lord willed it he could put his hand upon the engine and stay it in its full career. The vessel freighted with eight hundred lives is about to sink: but if the Lord willed it he could buoy it up in the hollow of his hand. Yet he does not move; the iron road is strewn with the dead, the river is gorged with corpses. We do not know all the reasons for this non-interference, but yet we think we can see a little, which little we will think upon. For, first, *such interpositions would change the whole arrangement of the world*: it would not be the same place at all. The Lord has made this world, and he governs it by certain fixed laws. If those laws were variable, and were continually being altered, it would be another form of creation altogether, and man had need to be another creature. His physical, moral, and even spiritual condition would be changed from top to bottom. It was the Lord's arrangement that he should put forth his power in certain ways which we call the laws of nature, and by that arrangement he abides. There is no such independent force as "nature," as some are always dreaming; nor is there any energy in mere laws of nature apart from God's own power. You may write all the laws you like, but there is no power in laws, there must be a power in the king to carry out the laws. All power emanates from God, be it what it may; he is the source and fountain of all the forces which operate throughout creation; but he has been pleased from the beginning to determine that his power shall usually go forth in certain ways, and under fixed laws and regulations. He can suspend those laws when he pleases; he can quench the violence of fire, stop the mouths of lions, and make water to stand upright as a heap; but he has not often done so, and in these days he never does so. I think we can in a measure see why; for if such were the case continually, the whole plan and purpose with which he made the present world would have been abandoned, and another mode of power would have taken its place.

Recollect, too, *that whatever the plan of God is, it is now being carried out under the shadow of the Fall*. There had been, I suppose, neither pain, nor sickness, nor sighing, nor death, had there been no sin. If it had been possible for a race to have multiplied from the glades of Eden, and to have gone forth into a wider Paradise as pure and holy as Adam first came from his Maker's hands, I can believe that there would have been no famine, no war, no catastrophe of shipwreck by sea, nor of accident by land; but however multitudinous the human race might have become its records would have been all unstained with agonizing details such as those which blacken the broadsheets of to-day. But, alas, man *has fallen*, and to a race in such a condition it would not be consistent

that everything should be of sunlight and summer; there must now be heard the roar of the storm and the cry of death, as the fruit of sin. Render calamity impossible and what mark would there be of the divine displeasure for man's revolt? Wherein indeed would sin differ as to its consequences from obedience and holiness? Think for a little, and you will see reason for God's staying his hand from rescue.

Furthermore, *if interpositions were given to save the lives of godly men alone, as some would have it, then this world would become the place of judgment*, which it is not intended to be. It still remains among many persons as a superstition that if there is an accident, and people suffer, there must have been some special sin in the victims of the disaster; and yet our Lord has told us that the men upon whom the tower of Siloam fell were not sinners above others, and the Galileans who were slain by Pilate were not sinners above other Galileans. I pray you dismiss from your minds the idea that a sudden death is necessarily a judgment. Never draw any inference from the destruction of a building, or the wreck of a ship, or an explosion, or aught of that nature, as to the character of the persons who perish, for if you do you will be guilty of cruel injustice. What if some gracious man be spared, ascribe the deliverance to providence, but do not suppose that those who perished were less gracious than he. You shall find that men of bad character sometimes escape where saints are left to die. Because I said the other day that providence had saved a certain godly woman, foolish persons drew the inference that I condemned those who perished. No sentiment could have been further from my mind. I ascribe to providence death as well as life, and draw no inference as to the character of the person. What if a man has found a watery grave in the *Princess Alice*, do not therefore imagine that God was angry with him, for he may now be in Paradise, and at any rate the same wreck carried down with it many of the Lord's beloved. Now, if God were to interpose and save his own people whenever they were in danger, this world would become the place of judicial separation, which it is not and is not meant to be: judgment is reserved for the world to come. When Christ shall descend from heaven with a shout, and sit upon his great white throne—then will he separate the tares from the wheat, but now they are to grow together. Then will he put the goats on the left and the sheep on the right, but for the time present they feed in the same pastures. One event happeneth to them all; as it happeneth to the fool so happeneth it to the wise. This is not the land of judgment, but of longsuffering; not the place wherein God giveth sentence, but waiteth patiently awhile. There is a judgment of nations in this world, but that of individuals, with rare exceptions, is reserved for the final account.

Beloved, note once again that *if God were to interpose in the case of all calamities it would involve many evils*. For, observe, if next year the mass of farmers should refuse to sow the fields, if over whole nations the land should be left to produce only weeds, there would be great scarcity of corn. Suppose that in such cases God should interpose and cause harvests suddenly to grow by miracle, that our teeming millions might escape starvation, what would be the consequence? Why, it would encourage idleness everywhere; men would say, "The Lord is too good to let us starve, and therefore we may allow the plough to rust, and dance

away the hours." Would that be well? Suppose again that when a contagious disease comes into a district the Lord miraculously prevented it from being fatal, although the carelessness of men may have left fever-lairs in rotting, overcrowded houses enough to pollute the very air. Suppose, I say, that we all neglected sanitary laws, and then knew that a merciful God would not let the poor people die of fever, or of cholera, then the filthiness of our cities would increase till they became huge dung-hills, and man who is great enough now at polluting rivers and defiling God's earth in every imaginable way, would go on to turn the whole earth into one monstrous globe of rottenness. But now even pests and plagues and fevers have their good side, they are watchmen to sound an alarm, prophets to give us warning. They arouse man to discover the laws of his being, and thus they benefit the race. Suppose again that whenever there is a likelihood of there being an accident God were to send an angel at once to interpose, and avert the collision or the wreck, what would happen? Why then, of course, every railway and steamboat company might go in for accidents in any quantity, seeing they would be harmless, and might even become attractive. There would be no reason for keeping a watch at the ship's bow, and no necessity for breaks or signals. There would be no longer any need to be careful about human life, but we might each one be as reckless as he pleased, and gratify himself with experiments which could not end fatally. Such a state of things would destroy many of the virtues, and render many vices harmless. I cannot suppose a world regulated upon such a system; I can imagine God divinely interposing and suspending his own laws now and then, as pleaseth him, for some great purpose of instruction; but it appears wise and good for all concerned that, having made man what he is, the Creator should rather leave him to take the consequence of violating the fixed laws of matter than make those laws variable and uncertain.

Again, dear friends, *divine interpositions of a miraculous sort would not be attended with the advantage to the ungodly which we might suppose*, because if there were miracles of mercy on the behalf of God's people to snatch them from a watery grave, or from the devouring element of fire, or from the deadly consequences of a collision, then we might expect to have, and naturally should have, miracles of judgment, too. If you get into the wilderness, and manna falls from heaven, and water leaps from the rock, remember you have also entered a land where the earth opens to swallow up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and where the very sand breeds fiery serpents to sting to death the rebels against God. You cannot have the mercy-wonder interposing without having the judgment-wonder side by side with it: and on the whole it is a more lenient mode of dealing on God's part to let sinners alone, and to let one event happen to all men for a while, because the longsuffering of God leadeth the sinner to repentance, and the sorrow that falleth upon the child of God is blessed to him. If all accidental deaths were punishments it would be a far more terrible state of things than that which is now before us; and therefore the matter is best as it is.

If we had wonders of miraculous deliverance often before us they would not impress mankind as we imagine. If God were always suffering the wicked to drown or burn, and always snatching the righteous

from the midst of every danger, men would not think much of it after all; they might be slightly impressed at first, but by-and-by they would harden their hearts. In Egypt there was light in the houses of the Israelites when all was dark with the Egyptians, and God smote Egypt heavily while he was blessing Israel; but this fact did not affect Pharaoh, for he only hardened his heart the more. When in the wilderness the Israelites, murmuring against God, saw some of their companions swallowed up and destroyed, it very little affected them; for soon after they began murmuring against Moses, and charged him with destroying the people of God. All things considered, the arrangement is best as it is, and the Lord knows it is so, and, therefore, continues the method of letting physical law take its course, although occasionally it may destroy hundreds of lives.

Neither would it be so great a gain to the godly, as some imagine, always to have their lives spared in times of danger. We have to die some day, brothers and sisters, and we have nothing here below which might make us anxious to postpone the hour of our departure. It is as well to die one way as another: at least, there is small choice in the modes of death. If one were asked by what death he should glorify God, he might be long in the choosing, and probably would then choose that which would be most painful. Some are afraid to go to sea lest they should be drowned, and yet there is little reason for the fear. When a captain was asked whether he was not afraid to go to sea he said, "Not at all." "But your father was drowned, captain?" "Yes." "Your grandfather was drowned?" "Yes." "Your brothers have been drowned?" "Yes." "Are you not afraid to go to sea?" "No," said he, "not at all; for I may ask you the same question. Your father is dead?" "Yes." "Where did he die?" "In his bed." "And his father, where did he die?" "In his bed." "And his father?" "In his bed." "And your brothers, where have they died?" "In their beds." "Are you not, then, afraid to go to bed?" Certainly we must die somewhere or other, and we shall not die one single minute before the ordained period. I am a sufficient believer in predestination to feel sure that every bullet has its billet, and that no death can befall the man whom God ordains to live. God hath appointed all things, and his people are safe everywhere, whether they live or die. "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, nor divination against Israel;" the powers of darkness cannot harm us though they put forth all their craft and power. The Lord has declared that he who hath made God his refuge shall abide beneath his shadow, and therefore we may go where duty calls us without trembling, and we may die when God bids our spirit return without the slightest fear. We ask no immunity from death. Why should we be absolved from it? It is better to die than to live full often, inasmuch as it is better to be in heaven than to remain in banishment below. So there I leave that matter of the non-interposition of God to think very briefly of interpositions which do occur.

II. PROVIDENTIAL INTERPOSITIONS ARE FREQUENT AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE: they can often say, "He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters." Divine interpositions come in the way of deliverance from floods of trouble. Have you not experienced them? How strikingly has God delivered some of us! What remarkable

preservations of life have we enjoyed ; not miraculous, certainly, but full of wonder for all that. We have as much reason to praise God for our deliverances as if the laws of nature had been suspended, for we have been quite as completely preserved. What helps we have had in the hour of sorrow, when one after another our beloved have been taken from us, or when they have gone to the very edge of the grave, and yet have been spared to us. How often have we been helped in business troubles and saved from impending failure or serious loss ! In times of slander, when our character has been belied, how graciously has God brought to light our innocence ! I say again, not by miracle, but yet very marvellously has our God delivered us. In answer to prayer God worketh in his own way for the good of his people without stopping one single wheel of providence : without violating one single law of nature, God is able to work the same end as we sometimes wish he would work by a miracle. He will not quench the violence of the flame, but yet a precious life shall be snatched from a burning house. He will not prevent the water from drowning, and yet in how many cases in answer to prayer have vessels been saved and the lives of men preserved by unexpected incidents ! He will not stop the ordinary run of business, nor alter the way in which the world goes on, and yet he knows how to help the poor, and to bless the struggling tradesman, and to bring up the righteous from deep distress. A miracle is a rough procedure after all, if I may dare say so, compared with the Lord's present methods. The grandest achievement of all is for the Lord God to work miraculous results without miracles, to produce by common means, in answer to the cry of his servants, that which appears to be impossible without a suspension of natural laws. See how the Lord allows all the forces of nature to drive on in their ordinary course, and yet the outcome of it all is that his servant is delivered and his prayers answered.

God doth this by very varied ways. We have known some who have been brought out of deep waters by having health suddenly restored to them, or by having the health of those upon whom their maintenance depended renewed. This is God's mercy, and let him be praised for it. Sometimes circumstances have greatly changed ; a man has been going down hill for years as to his business, but something quite unexpected has happened, and he has just as gradually risen to a position of comfort. My friends, believe in the unexpected. I was about to utter a paradox, and say expect the unexpected. Believe that God will do for you something which you know nothing about. The Lord always has a plan in reserve. You think he has reached his last, and you will be left to perish ; but it is not so. At the right moment he will bring forth some new and surprising stroke of wisdom, which he did but postpone to the particular moment, so that when he performs it, and draws his servant out of deep waters, the praise and the glory will the more fully redound to his name. We have known the Lord save his servants in the hour of trouble by touching the hearts of their enemies ; those that were most unkind and cruel have suddenly become the most generous and thoughtful. At other times enemies have died or have been put to confusion, like the wicked Haman when he plotted the destruction of the Jews. The Lord has hanged up Haman that his chosen might be delivered.

Mordecai has gone from the king's gate to the king's house, and Haman has ascended from the king's table to the king's gallows. I cannot instance all the ways in which the Lord makes clear the pathway of his people, but this I know that often in our lives some of us have had to pause and sing, "He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters."

Some will not see the hand of God, but I warrant you, brethren, those who have been delivered out of the deep waters will see it. Their experience teaches them that God is yet among us. Others may talk about "laws of nature," as if God were gone to sleep and had left the world wound up like a watch to go without him; but those who have been in sore affliction and tribulation, and have been brought out therefrom, will for ever bless and extol him who is a very present help in trouble. Yes, my brethren, the way by which we have come hitherto is as full of God as this city is full of men. There are deserts which the foot of man hath never trodden, but there is no wilderness where the foot of God hath not been. What say you, my beloved friends, you are not fanatics, neither has the enthusiasm of devotion carried you out of your minds; but are you not conscious of distinct providential deliverances? "Conscious of them," say you, "indeed, if we did not speak of them with joy and thankfulness, the very stones of the street would cry out against us for our wicked silence. Many and many a time hath he sent from above, and rescued us. We are, like Moses, drawn out of the waters, and like him we would be servants of the Lord."

III. Now, thirdly, INTERPOSITIONS IN MATTERS OF GRACE ARE THE CHIEF OF ALL. As best I can I should like to conclude with a few words upon this subject. God does not, even to save the souls of his chosen, violate any of his laws. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "Every transgression shall have its just punishment and reward." Yet the Lord would save his people. How should he make these two things agree,—how should he be just and yet the justifier of the ungodly? It is in the person of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ that we see how one law has been made to counteract and yet to honour another, to remove its direful consequence and yet to make it honourable. You recollect that the law of the Medes and Persians could not be altered; and there was a law made by Ahasuerus that on a certain day the people of all countries might gather themselves together and kill the Jews. Haman had promulgated this royal edict far and wide, and the king could not alter it. Mark the wise method by which the cruel law was met; they made another law, which was—that the Jews might defend themselves, might slay those who tried to kill them, and take all their property for a spoil. This met the case, though no edict was revoked. Now, God does not and never will alter his law that sin must be punished; but forth comes another law that, inasmuch as the first sin was committed by a representative man, a representative man should be permitted to come in and bear the penalty which was consequent thereon. This has been done; no law has been broken, and yet God's mercy has had free course.

Now let us think a minute or two upon this great salvation and how it is described in the text. "He sent from above." Oh, blessed Lord, the whole race of man was sinking in the old vessel of the covenant of

works which had been cut in pieces by the first sin; they were all going down *en masse* to destruction. Then thou didst send from above. But who was he that was sent? Not the brightest of the cherubim nor the chief of the angelic band, but HE came, the messenger of the covenant, whom we delight in, the Son of God, the only begotten of the Most High, the brightness of his Father's glory. He was the Messiah, the sent one, and he descended from above that he might work out our redemption. Brethren, let your hearts leap for joy as you behold the messenger of the covenant of grace, even Jesus Christ, the adorable and ever blessed Son of the Highest.

Now, note the next word, "He took me." When we had lost all hold on God then did this blessed messenger take hold on us. He accepted us as the Father's gift to him, and accepted a charge as the great Shepherd of the sheep, that he would keep and preserve those whom his Father gave him, though they were ready to perish. Then what a hold he took on us. He took not up angels, but he took up the seed of Abraham, by becoming a man. Babe in Bethlehem, labourer at Nazareth, suffering man at Gethsemane, thou hast taken indeed a hold on us, such as thou wouldst not relax in life or death! "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us," and so being sent from above he took hold upon us.

Then what a wondrous *drawing* took place after that grip had once been given. He drew us out of many waters, entering into them himself, plunging into the rivers of grief and infirmity, and then into the waters of the curse, being "made a curse for us": descending deep, as it were, into the very depths of hell to bring up the Lord's jewels, that they might be delivered from the pit. Oh, the matchless uplifting which he gave to us when he drew us out of many waters by his own suffering life and agonizing death. Fix your eyes, brethren, upon the work of Jesus. See the human race all sinking. Behold how hopeless and helpless it is; and see him descending, walking the waters, snatching with his own right hand sinking men and women from the billows of destruction, and landing them on the Rock of Ages, putting a new song into their mouths. As you feel that you are partakers of this deliverance, let each one of you say, "He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters."

This was the great deed itself, but, just a minute, I ask you to remember the application of it to your own experience. Do you recollect when you felt everything sinking from beneath you? My own self-wreck will help me to describe your experience. I had sailed on gallantly in the good vessel of my own works, hearing music, and full of delight, never dreaming of danger; but suddenly the law of God came along, moving unswervingly in its terrible course, and it cut into the vessel of my works, as though it had been vanity itself. Down it began to sink, and I with it. I looked around for something I could lay hold upon, but nothing availed. The priest was there and offered me his inventions, but I knew him of old, and knew that he would sink as well as I. What, then, could he do for me? Ceremonials were there, but I knew that they prove bubbles to a man who trusts in them. Hopes of salvation by self-mortification were there, and the like, but they clearly could not bear the weight of such a sinner as I was. I sank, I sank, nor had I will or wish to be saved, nor did I struggle for life; yet Jesus came,

whose will of grace precedes our will, whose purpose of love outruns our desire for salvation. "He took me": well do I recollect his grasp. He took me and made me more conscious of my danger than I had been before. He took me, by his Holy Spirit, and I knew that he had taken me, for I began to feel his grip tightening upon me. He drew me gradually to look at him, to trust him, and to leave myself and all my hopes entirely in his hand, then he drew me right out of the many waters and made my heart to sing for joy. Do you not recollect the time with yourself? As you look with wonder upon some friend who has been rescued from the great calamity of this week, I want you to feel that you may look with equal wonder upon yourself, for you have experienced a greater rescue. You have been delivered from sinking into the pit that hath no bottom, a sinking down in sin and into the lower depths of corruption. He came from heaven, he took you, he drew you out of many waters, therefore praise and bless his name! You were too anxious to hope, and yet he taught you to hope in his mercy. You were too despairing to struggle, but he made you exercise holy violence to enter the kingdom. You were too weary and despondent to trust, but he led you to faith. His divine Spirit wrought all your works in you, and here you are sitting in this house of prayer this morning to say, "He hath delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling."

Now, I should not wonder if since then you have been pretty nearly shipwrecked as to your spiritual hopes, and have a second and a third time been rescued. You have begun to grow somewhat cold, and you have wandered from the Lord, and you have, therefore, dreaded the total destruction of all true religion within your spirit. Then you have cried out in fear "I have been a hypocrite, or a mere formalist, and shall perish after all." But when you were ready to give all up under the temptation of the powers of darkness the Lord has again restored you. Has he not sent from above and taken you out of the deep yet again? Yes, blessed be his name, he has sought you and led you back to his ways. If I address a backslider who feels as if he were sinking deeper and deeper, I would pray for him that he may yet know how Christ can save a sinking Peter and bring a runaway Jonah to the shore again.

Last of all, we shall soon come into the many waters of death: sooner, perhaps, than we think. To some the stream of death is very shallow. We have known certain of the saints go over dry-shod, singing all the way. They can hardly have been conscious of death, nor have known when they were last on earth and when they were first in heaven. But there are others who have to cross Jordan at a time when it overfloweth its banks, and, like Christian in the "Pilgrim's Progress," they are up to their necks in the stream, and need words of comfort. You remember how one said, "Fear not, brother, I feel the bottom, and it is good." There is a rocky bottom all the way across. No slippery sand nor sucking mud, but sound rock from shore to shore, and however deep it is, it is never so deep as to drown a believer's hope, nor destroy his soul. Yet I can imagine the best of saints to be flooded with many troubles in their last hours—physical weakness, depression of spirit, temptations of Satan, family difficulties, all increase the swellings of Jordan. Do you know what will happen? He will send from above, he will take you, and he

will draw you out of many waters, and you shall rise to glory. What a heaven of heavens above others will you feel when you go right up from the depths to the heights! To leap right away from *de profundis* to *in excelsis*, from the death-sweat and the expiring faintness to the ecstasy and the ineffable glory, how transcendent the bliss! What an exchange it will be, brethren, for those who have grown old and decrepid, or for those who could scarcely say even a word to testify their dying faith, to find themselves on a sudden rid of every ache and pain, and all their withering flesh, and to be disembodied in perfect liberty, charmed with the beatific vision of their Lord, from whom they are never to part again. Why, methinks, we might almost choose the death-road of the two. Some are very fond of expecting that their Lord will surely come in time to prevent their dying. Ah, well, you may be very thankful if it happens, but I do not think it is the way I shall go, nor can I say that I envy you the prospect in which you delight. In heaven you will come to us who die, and ask us—What was it to fall asleep in Jesus? What was the feeling of putting off the body? What was the joy of being made like our Covenant Head in death? I do not say that you will regret that you did not descend into the tomb, but of this I am sure, none of us who shall sleep will think that you had any preference over us.

“Where should the dying members rest,
But with their dying Head?”

If the Master went that way, descending into the sepulchre, and so up by the hill of resurrection to the golden gate, we will not even envy Enoch and Elias, though they were permitted to take the reserved route, and enter the city by the postern gate. It shall be all well with us if we are resting in Jesus, for at the last he will send from above and take us, and draw us out of many waters. To his name be praises. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm xviii. 1—31.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—18, 296, 428.

SHILLING SERIES—No. 4.

THE MOURNER'S COMFORTER:

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Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

AN ANXIOUS ENQUIRY FOR A BELOVED SON.

A Sermon

Suggested by the loss of the "Princess Alice,"

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 5TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And the king said, Is the young man Absalom safe?"—2 Samuel xviii. 29.

THIS was said by David after a great battle in which many had been slain, and the hosts led by Absalom had fallen to the number of twenty thousand; perishing not only by the sword, but among the thick oaks and tangled briers of the wood, which concealed fearful precipices and great caverns, into which the rebels plunged in their wild fright when the rout set in. His father's anxious question concerned his wicked but still well-beloved son, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" He does not appear to have asked, "How have we won the victory?" but "Is the young man Absalom safe?" Not "Is Joab, the captain of my host, alive, for upon him so much depends?" but "Is the young man Absalom safe?" Not "How many of our noble troops have fallen in the battle?" but "Is the young man Absalom safe?" It has been said that he showed here more of the father than of the king—more of affection than of wisdom; and that is, doubtless, a correct criticism upon the old man's absorbing fondness. David was no doubt, in this case, weak in his excessive tenderness. But, brethren, it is much more easy for us to blame a father under such circumstances than for us quite to understand his feelings; I may add, it would be wiser to sympathize, as far as we can, than to sit in judgment upon a case which has never been our own. Perhaps if we were placed in the same position we should find it impossible to feel otherwise than he did. How many there are at this present moment who have, no doubt, other very weighty businesses, but whose one only thought just now is, "Is the young man safe? Is my son safe? Is my father safe? Is my wife safe?" A vessel has gone down in the river with hundreds on board, and weeping friends are going hither and thither from place to place, hoping and yet fearing to identify the corpse of some beloved one; longing to find

one who has not been heard of since the fatal hour, and trembling all the while lest they should find him or her among the bodies which have been drawn from the cold stream. The one thought uppermost with scores to-night is this one—"Is my beloved one safe?" Do you blame them? They are neglecting business, and forsaking their daily toil, but do you blame them? A hundred weighty things are forgotten in the one eager enquiry: do you, can you, blame them? Assuredly not. It is natural, and it is therefore, I think, but right. Though, no doubt, David did afterwards show a measure of petulance and of rebellion against God, and is not altogether to be commended, yet who that has a father's heart within him would not rather undertake to justify than to censure the aged parent? When the old man asks concerning his son, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" and, finding that he is not, cries, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" we would not, like Joab, go in to him and coarsely upbraid him, however much he might deserve it, but we would rather sit down and weep in sympathy with those that feel a kindred anxiety, and see if we may not learn something from their sorrow. If our own anxieties are free in that direction, let us turn them in some other direction which may be really useful, and tend to the glory of God.

Let us first, to-night, consider for a little *this question of anxiety*, then *think of occasions for its use*, and then, thirdly, *suggest answers which may be given to it*.

I. First, let us think of THIS QUESTION OF ANXIETY—"Is the young man Absalom safe?"

And the first remark is, *it is a question asked by a father concerning his son*. "Is he safe?" The anxieties of parents are very great, and some young people do not sufficiently reflect upon them, or they would be more grateful, and would not so often increase them by their thoughtless conduct. I am persuaded that there are many sons and daughters who would not willingly cost their parents sorrow, who, nevertheless, do flood their lives with great grief. It cannot always be innocently that they do this: there must be a measure of wanton wrong about it in many cases where young people clearly foresee the result of their conduct upon their friends. There are some young men, especially, who in the indulgence of what they call their freedom trample on the tender feelings of her that bare them, and frequently cause sleepless nights and crushing troubles to both their parents. This is a crime to be answered for before the bar of God, who has given a special promise to dutiful children, and reserves a special curse for rebellious ones. All parents must have anxieties. There is never a babe dropped into a mother's bosom but it brings care, labour, grief, and anxiety with it. There is a joy in the parental relationship, but there must necessarily be a vast amount of anxious care with it throughout those tender years of infancy in which the frail cockle-shell boat of life seems likely to be swamped by a thousand waves which sweep harmlessly over stronger barques. The newly-lit candle is so readily blown out that mothers nurse and watch with a care which frequently saps the parental life. But our children, perhaps, do not give us most anxiety when they are infants, nor when we have them at school, when we can put them to bed and

give them a good-night's kiss and feel that all is safe ; the heavy care comes afterwards—afterwards when they have broken through our control, when they are running alone, and on their own account, when they are away from our home, when they are out of the reach of our rebuke, and do not now feel as once they did the power of our authority, and hardly of our love. It is then to many parents that the time of severe trial begins, and, doubtless, many a grey head has been brought with sorrow to the grave by having to cry, "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." Many a father and many a mother die, murdered, not with knife or poison, but by unkind words and cruel deeds of their own children. Many and many a grave may well be watered by the tears of sons and daughters, because they prematurely filled those graves by their ungrateful conduct. Let us all think, who still have parents spared to us, how much we owe to them, and let it be our joy, if we cannot recompense them, at any rate to give them so much of comfort by our conduct as shall show our gratitude. Let them have such joy in us that they may never regret the anxieties of past years, but may have their hearts made to rejoice that they brought into the world such sons and daughters. If we have had parents who did care for us, and anxiously said, "Are they safe?" let us be grateful to God, and let us never show that we undervalue his mercy by treating the boon with contempt.

Secondly, *this was a question asked about a son who had left his father's house.* "Is the young man Absalom safe?" As I have already said, we have not so much anxiety about our children when they are at home and when the nursery holds them as we have afterwards when they are beyond our reach. They have formed their own attachments, and have commenced life entirely on their own account. Even if they are in the same town, we are concerned for their welfare ; but if they are in another land, we have still more anxious thoughts. Possibly some of you have your sons and daughters far removed from you, and I do not doubt that, if it be so, you often start at night with the question, "How fares it with my boy? How is it with my son?" He is far away there, an emigrant, or a sailor at sea, or in some distant country town engaged in earning his livelihood, and you wonder whether he is alive and well. If you know him to be on shore, you would fain know whether he goes regularly to the house of God on the Sabbath-day. You wonder where he spends his evenings. You wonder into what sort of company he may have fallen, what sort of master or shopmates he lives with, and what are the influences of his home. I am quite sure that such anxious questions frequently plough deep furrows across your minds. There are some young men here to-night, in London, come to live in our great city, and I want kindly to remind them of the tender thoughts about them at home—how mother and father, perhaps at this very hour, are thinking of them and praying for them. They would be glad, probably, to know that their son is where he is, but they might have sorrow if they knew where sometimes he wastes his evenings, and where he has begun to spend a part of his Sabbath-day. They would be grieved to know that he is beginning to forget the habits formed at home—that now in the room where there are others sleeping he is afraid to bow his knee in prayer—that the Bible in which

his mother wrote his name, and concerning which the promise was given that there should be a portion read every day has not been read, but some book of very doubtful character has taken its place. Young friend, some of us who are a little older know your experience of leaving home, and we trust you will know our experience of having been followed by the prayers and tears of parents who have lived to rejoice that their prayers for us were abundantly answered. May it be so in your case, for, if not, you will go from bad to worse and perish in your sin. Yet it is very hard for a young man to go down to hell, riding steeple-chase over a mother's prayers. It takes a great deal of energy to damn yourself when a father and a mother are pleading for your salvation, and yet there are some who accomplish it; and, when they come into the place of ruin and destruction, surely there shall be a heavier measure meted out to them than to those who were trained in the gutter and tutored in the street, and never knew what it was to be the subjects of parental prayer. O Lord Jesus, thou who didst raise the widow's dead son, save those sons who are dead in trespasses and in sins, who are even now being carried out to be buried in the tomb of vice and corruption.

"Is the young man Absalom safe?" may very readily remind us of the anxieties of Christian parents about their sons and daughters when they are away from home.

But there is a touching point about this. *It is the question of a father about his rebellious son.* Absalom—the young man Absalom—why should David be concerned about him? Was he not up in arms against him? Did he not thirst for his father's blood? Was he not at the head of a vast host, seeking anxiously to slay his father, that he might wear his crown, which he had already usurped. Why, methinks, he might have said, "Is the young man Absalom dead? for if he is out of the way there will be peace to my realm, and rest to my troubled life." But no, he is a father, and he must love his own offspring. It is a father that speaks, and a father's love can survive the enmity of a son. He can live on and love on even when his son seeks his heart's blood. What a noble passion is a mother's love or a father's love! It is an image in miniature of the love of God. How reverently ought we to treat it! How marvellously has God been pleased to endow, especially godly people, with the sacred instinct of affection towards their children, an instinct which God sanctifies to noblest ends. Our children may plunge into the worst of sins, but they are our children still. They may scoff at our God; they may tear our heart to pieces with their wickedness; we cannot take complacency in them, but at the same time we cannot unchild them, nor erase their image from our hearts. We do earnestly remember them still, and shall do so as long as these hearts of ours shall beat within our bosoms. I have now and then met with professing Christians who have said, "That girl shall never darken my door again." I do not believe in their Christianity. Whenever I have met with fathers who are irreconcilable to their children, I am convinced that they are unreconciled to God. It cannot be possible that there should exist in us a feeling of enmity to our own offspring after our hearts have been renewed; for if the Lord has forgiven us, and received us into his family, surely we can forgive the chief of those

who have offended us; and when they are our own flesh and blood we are doubly bound to do so. To cast off our own children is unnatural, and that which is unnatural cannot be gracious. If even publicans and sinners forgive their children, much more must we. Let them go even to extremities of unheard-of sin, yet as the mercy of God endureth for ever, so must the love of a Christian parent still endure. If David says, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" we have none of us had a son that has acted one half so badly as Absalom; and we must, therefore, still forgive and feel a loving interest in those who grieve us.

At this time I would address any young person who has been a great grief to those at home? Do you treat this matter lightly? Do your parents' anxieties seem to you to be foolishness? Ah, let me remind you that though your course of life may be sport to you, it is death to those at home. You may dry up your heart towards your mother, but your mother's heart still overflows with love to you. You may even count it a joke that you have caused her tears; but those tears are sincere, and reveal her inward agony of soul. Can you ridicule such tender affection? I have known some young people who have fallen so low as to have made mockery of their parents' piety. It is a horrible thing to do, and woe unto those who have been guilty of it. Yet many Christian parents only return prayers and greater affection for such unkindness as this, and still go on to lay their children's case before God, and beseech him for his mercy's sake to have mercy upon them. Now, erring young man, since there is something human remaining in you, I appeal to your tenderer nature that you will not continue to offend against such marvellous love, and will not wantonly go on to trample on such patient forgiveness. Absalom, if he could have heard his father ask the question, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" was, I doubt not, bad enough still to have rebelled against him; but I hope it is not so with anyone here; nay, I trust that when the most wilful shall see the deep and true love of their parents' hearts they will hasten to be reconciled to them, and spend the rest of their lives in undoing the ill which they have done.

The question of my text is the question of a parent concerning *a son who, if he were not safe, but dead, was certainly in a very dreadful plight.* "Is the young man Absalom safe?" said David, with all the deeper earnestness because he felt that if he was not alive he was in an evil case. He has died red-handed in rebellion against his father—into what shades must his guilty soul have descended? O beloved, that is a very serious question to ask about any departed person. Where is he? Is his soul safe? I could almost pray that, when any die by sudden death, they might be God's people, and that the sinners might escape till they have found Christ. We admire that Christian man who, finding himself with another at the bottom of a coal pit, was about to ascend in the cage. There was only a chance for one, for the basket would hold no more. He had taken his place, but he left it, and said to the other miner, "My soul is saved; I am a believer in Christ. You are not. If you die you are a lost man. Jump into the cage." Thus he allowed his unconverted companion to escape, and ventured his own life in his stead. If we are ourselves in Christ, it would be Christlike to be ready to die instead of the unsaved;

then should we carry out David's wish—"Would God I had died for thee." To die—the bitterness of death is passed where there is a good hope through grace; but for those to die who have no hope, no Christ, no heaven—this is death indeed. I can very well imagine any of you asking very seriously about your sons and daughters, "Are they safe?" when you know that if they have been suddenly taken away they were altogether unprepared. If men and women are unconverted when they die they will die twice, and the second death is the most to be feared. Are not some of you, my hearers, in such danger? Dear friends, where would you be suppose at this moment the blast of death were to pass through this house and chill your very marrow? If, now, the secret arrow must find a target in some one bosom, where would you be if it should be ordained for you? Do ask yourself the question, and, if you have no hope in Christ, God help you to seek and find forgiveness by the precious blood of Jesus.

Yet, once more, *this was a question, alas! which was asked by a father about a son who was really dead at the time when the question was asked.* It was late in the day to enquire for Absalom's safety; for it was all over with that rebellious son. The three darts of Joab had gone through the very heart of Absalom, and there, hanging by its hair in the oak, his body dangled between earth and heaven. He had already been justly executed for his crimes, and yet his father asked, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" It is too late to ask questions about our children when they are dead. I should think that David's heart must have been pierced with many sorrows at the thought of his own negligence of his children, for there are hints in his life which lead us to fear that, if not altogether an Eli, he was far too negligent in the matter of household management. We read of one son of his that his father had never denied him anything, and I can hardly imagine a man to be a good father of whom that could be said concerning any one of his sons. The practice of polygamy is altogether destructive of proper family discipline, and David had erred greatly in that respect; besides which he was so occupied with public affairs, that his sons were allowed too great a liberty. And now he is vainly asking "Is the young man Absalom safe?" The question is too late. It is of no use to wring your hands if your boy has grown up to be a debauchee and a drunkard: train him while he is yet young, and bring him with your prayers and tears to Christ while yet a child. Mother, it will little avail you to tear your hair because of a daughter's dishonour if you have permitted her to go into society where temptations abound. Let us do for our children what we can do for them *while* they are little ones. While the warm metal flows, as it were, soft and plastic, let us try to turn it into the right mould: for if it once grows cold, we may beat it in vain, it will not take the desired image and superscription. Oh that those of us who have little children about us may have grace to train them up in the way they should go, for when they are old they will not depart from it. You cannot bend the tree, but you can twist the sapling: look ye well to it. Snatch the opportunity while yet it is before you, lest, when your children have plunged into sin, or may even have plunged into the pit, you vex your souls in vain and cry, "Woe is me." I shall never forget the anguish of a poor illiterate woman

whom I had been the means of leading to Christ. She was rejoicing in Christ when I had seen her before, but when I saw her next she was in great sorrow and bondage of spirit, and I said to her, "What aileth thee?" She replied, "My children! my children! They are all grown up, and they are all ungodly. My husband died and left me a widow with five or six of them. I worked hard morning and night, as you know I must have done, to find them clothes and food; and I brought them up as well as I could; but, woe's me, I never thought about their souls. How could I?" said she, "for I never thought about my own; and now I am saved, but they are all worldly and careless, and I cannot undo the mischief." She told me that, touched with a feeling of love to her children, she had resolved to go and speak to each of them about their eternal state; and she made her first visit to her eldest son, who had a family of children around him, and when she began to tell him about her conversion and her salvation and joy in the Lord, he so cruelly laughed her to scorn that it broke her heart. I did all I could to cheer and comfort her; but I can only say to younger persons, who are converted whilst still they have their little ones about them, never let the occasion go, lest you have to cry out at last, "O Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son! for thou hast fallen in thy iniquity, and it may be thy blood will be required at thy parent's hands." God grant that this question of anxiety may be asked in time by wise parents, and not left till its answer shall smite as doth a dagger.

II. Secondly. You have had the question; we are now to speak upon SOME OCCASIONS WHEN THAT QUESTION WOULD VERY NATURALLY BE USED. "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

The question would be used, of course, in times, like the present, *in reference to this mortal life*. When a fearful calamity has swept away hundreds at a stroke such an enquiry is on every lip. On Wednesday morning how many families must have looked down those fearful lists, having been up all night watching and waiting for some one who did not come home. What a dreadful night to spend in watching for son or father, or daughter or mother; and how awful the tidings of the morning! In the case of a family near my own house, the servant was left at home with one little babe, and all the rest of the family went out for a day's pleasure and health-seeking. Nobody has ever come home! Nobody has come to relieve the servant and embrace the child! You may imagine the anxiety of that servant with her little charge, to find master and mistress and the rest never coming home. There is also a case of a mother upstairs with a new-born little one at her side, and her husband and her other children, who had gone out, never returned. May we never know such sorrow! Then is the question asked in accents of terror, "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

Times of disease, also, raise such enquiries. Well do I recollect some four-and-twenty years ago, when first I came to London, it was my painful duty to go, not only by day, but by night, from house to house where the cholera was raging; and almost every time I met the beloved friends at Park Street it was my sorrow to hear it said, "Mr. So-and-so is dead. Mistress A. or B. is gone," till I sickened myself from very grief.

It was then most natural that each one should say concerning his relative at a little distance, "Is he still alive? Is he still safe?"

Now, if in any future day the shadow of a disaster should cross your path, and you should be in fear that your beloved ones are lost, I pray you, if you are Christian people, exercise faith at such a time, and stay yourselves upon God. Recollect, if you become so anxious as to lose your clearness of mind, you will not be fit for the emergency. It may be that by retaining calmness of soul you will be of service; but by giving up the very helm of your mind, and allowing yourself to drift before the torrent of anxiety, you will become useless and helpless. In patience possess your souls. The world is in God's hand after all. The young man Absalom will not die without the appointment of heaven. Your children are not out of the keeping of the Most High. However dear they are to you, and however great their peril, there is One that ruleth and overruleth; and quiet prayer has more power with him than impatient fretfulness. If your dear ones are dead you cannot restore them to life by your unbelief; and if they still survive, it will be a pity to be downcast and unbelieving when there is no occasion for it. "Your strength is to sit still." Remember that you are a Christian, and a Christian is expected to be more self-possessed than those who have no God to fly to. The holy self-composedness of faith is one of the things which recommend it to the outside world, and men who see Christian men and women calm, when others are beside themselves, are led to ask, "What is this?" and unconsciously to own, "This is the finger of God." So when you ask the painful question before us, ask it still with faith in God.

But, dear friends, sometimes we have to ask this question about friends and children, *with regard to their eternal life*. They are dead, and we are fearful that they did not die in Christ, and therefore we enquire, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" It is very painful to the Christian minister when that question is put to him, and it is not for him to answer it in most cases. As a rule he knows too little of the person to form a judgment. He may, perhaps, have paid a visit or two, and he may have been encouraged by a few hopeful words: but what can we judge from a dying-bed? It is very easy for a dying person to be deceived and to deceive others, and we had better leave judgments and decisions in the hand of God. Those who know all about the person's life, and have been in the chamber all the time of his sickness, and know more, how should they judge? I answer, where there has been no previous godly life, where the conversion must have been a very late one, and the signs and marks of it are feeble—*judge hopefully, but judge honestly*. You are allowed to hope, but still be honest, and avoid, above all things, the unwisdom I have seen in some people of holding up a son or a daughter or a friend for an example, when the individual has lived an ungodly life, and never showed the slightest sign of grace while in active life, but merely used a pious expression or two at the last. Hope if you dare, but be very careful of what you say. To parade the few last words as if they had more weight in them than a long life cast into the other scale is very unwise. It is most injurious to the rest of the family, and is apt to make them feel that they may live as they like, and yet be considered saints when they die. I rather admire, though

I might not imitate, a father who, on the contrary, when his ungodly son died, said to his sons and daughters, "My dear children, much as I wish I could have any hope about your brother, his whole life was so inconsistent with anything like that of a Christian, that I fear he is lost for ever. I must warn you earnestly not to live as he lived, lest you should die as he died." There was honesty in such dealing, honesty to be admired. If you must judge and answer the question, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" be not so hopeful as to deceive yourselves and others, and be not so severe as to constitute yourselves judges upon a matter in which you can know, after all, but little, unless the whole life has been before you. In that case you may judge with some degree of certainty, for it is written, "By their fruits shall ye know them."

"Is the young man Absalom safe?" is a more practical question when we put it about young people and old people, when they are still alive, and we are anxious about *their spiritual condition*. "Is the young man Absalom safe?" That is to say, is he really safe for the future?—for this world and for the world to come. We saw him in the enquiry-room, we heard him speak out his anxiety, and we marked his tears; but is he safe? Not if he stops there. We have seen him since then at the house of God amongst the most earnest hearers. He leans forward to catch every syllable: he is evidently in earnest; but is he safe? Not if he stops there. He is a seeker: there can be no doubt about it. He has now begun to read his Bible, and he endeavours to draw near to God in prayer. Is he safe? Not if he stops even there. He must come to faith in Jesus Christ and really cast himself upon the great atonement made by the redeeming blood, or else he is not safe. The question for you Sunday-school teachers to ask about your children is, *Are they safe?* Have they reached the point in which they turn from darkness to light—from the power of Satan to the power of Christ? "Is the young man Absalom safe?" Is he *saved*? That is the point.

I believe there is a denomination of Christians who receive into membership those *who desire to be saved*. I will not judge such a plan, but I dare not follow it. To *desire* to be saved is a very simple matter, and means little. The point is to *be saved*. That is the question, and over it all our anxiety should be expended. "Is the young man Absalom"—not hopeful, not aroused or convicted, but is he "*safe*"? Is he saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation? Hear it all of you, and answer for yourselves.

III. The third point is to be THE ANSWERS WHICH WE HAVE TO GIVE TO THIS QUESTION—"Is the young man Absalom safe?"

This question has often been sent up by friends from the country about their lads who have come to London—"Is my boy Harry safe? Is my son John safe?" Answer, sometimes: "No, no. He is not safe. We are sorry to say that he is in great danger." I will tell you when we know he is not safe.

He is not safe if, like Absalom, he is at enmity with his father. Oh, no. He may attend a place of worship, and he may profess to pray, and he may even take upon himself the name of a Christian; but he is not safe if he is at enmity with his parents. That will not do at all.

Scripture saith, "If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" The words are quite as forcible if we read father instead of brother. If a man love not his own parents on earth, how can he love his Father who is in heaven? No, no; he is not safe.

"Is the young man safe?" Well, no. We have seen him lately in bad company. He has associated with other young men who are of loose morals. He prefers to spend his evenings where there may be bare decency in the songs and the conversation, but scarcely more. No, the young man Absalom is not safe there. He may be very moral himself, but he will not long remain pure if he goes into such society. If you sit among coals, if you do not burn yourself, you will blacken yourself. If you choose bad company, if you are not absolutely made to transgress as they do, yet you will damage your reputation. No, the young man Absalom is not safe.

And he is not safe, because he has taken to indulge in expensive habits. "Absalom prepared him," it is said, "chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him." This extravagance was a sign of evil. A youth who lavishes money upon needless luxuries is not safe. Certain young men of London, with small salaries, manage to cut a superb figure, and we fear that something wrong lies behind it. Their plain but honest and respected fathers certainly would not know them if they were to see them in full array. It is a bad sign when young men go in for dash and show beyond their position and means. Of course, every man's expenditure must be regarded with reference to his income and station in life. I am not touching upon the style of men of rank and fortune, though even there a vain-glorious appearance is the index of evil; but there are some young fellows scarcely out of their teens, or who have scarcely ended their apprenticeships, whose pocket-money must be easy to count, who nevertheless indulge themselves in all sorts of extravagances, and when I see them doing so I feel sure that the "young man Absalom" is not safe.

Another thing. The young man Absalom is not safe, as you may see, if you look at his personal appearance. We read, "But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. And when he polled his head, (for it was at every year's end that he polled it: because the hair was heavy on him, therefore he polled it:) he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred shekels after the king's weight." When young people are taken up with their own persons, and are vain of their hair, their looks, and their dress, we are sure that they are not safe, for pride is always in danger. Let young men and women dress according to their stations; we are not condemning them for that. I recollect Mr. Jay saying, "If you ladies will tell me your income to a penny, I will tell you how many ribbons you may wear to a yard"; and I think that I might venture to say the same. But I do notice that when young people begin to be vain of their beauty and fond of dress they are in great peril from various kinds of temptations. There is a canker-worm somewhere in their brain or their heart that will eat up their good resolutions and fair characters. No, the young man with his boasted beauty is not safe.

And we are sure the young man Absalom is not safe, when he has begun to be vicious. You recollect what Absalom did : I need not go into particulars. Now, many a young man, albeit he is not reckoned a bad fellow, has still gone astray in private life, and if all secrets were laid bare, he would be almost ashamed to sit among respectable people who now receive him into their society. No, he is not safe.

"Is the young man Absalom safe?" No, David, he is not, for the last time we saw him he was in a battle, and the people were dying all around him, and therefore he is not safe. How can he be safe where others fall? Yes, and I saw the young man come out of a low place of amusement late one night, and I thought, "No, the young man Absalom is not safe," for many perish there. I heard of his betting at the races, and I thought, "The young man Absalom is not safe, for multitudes are ruined there." I saw him in loose company one evening, and I said, "No, the young man Absalom is not safe : he is surrounded by those who hunt for the precious life." It is never safe for us to be where other people fall ; because if they perish, why should not we ? The youth did not see this, but answered me fiercely when I pointed out his danger. He said that he knew how to keep himself : it was not to be taken for granted, because he was going in for amusements, that he would become vicious. "Of course," said he, "there are young fellows who cannot take care of themselves, but I am quite able to look after myself. I can put on the drag whenever I please ; I am gay, but I am not bad ; I am free, but not vicious." Yes, but I wrote down, "The young man Absalom is not safe"—not half so safe as he thinks he is—and all the less safe, because he thinks so much of himself, and is so particularly sure that he can conquer where other people perish. No, the young man Absalom is not safe.

Now, the young man is here to-night who will answer to the next description. He is a very nice young fellow. All of us who know him love him and are right glad to see him among us. He is a great hearer and lover of the gospel word, *but he is not decided*. He has never taken his stand with God's people, confessing Christ as his Lord. "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian," he has often said ; but he is not quite persuaded yet. Is the young man safe? Oh, no. He is very hopeful, God bless him ! We will pray him into safety if we can ; but he is not safe yet. Those people who were almost saved from the wreck of the *Princess Alice* were drowned ; and those persons who are almost saved from sin are still lost. If you are almost alive you are dead ; if you are almost forgiven you are under condemnation ; if you are almost regenerated you are unregenerate ; if you are almost a Christian you are without God and without hope, and if you die almost saved you will be altogether lost.

O my dear young brother, I wish that I could answer and say, "Yes, the young man Absalom is safe : he has taken the decisive step, he has resigned himself into the hands of Jesus, and Jesus will keep him to the end." May the Holy Ghost lead you to this.

A pleasant task remains, I will now answer that question with a happy "Yes." Yes, the young man Absalom is safe.

Why? Well, first, because he is a believer in Christ. He has cast himself upon Jesus. He knew that he could not save himself,

and so he came to Christ that Christ might save him, and he has left himself entirely in the hands of Jesus to be his for ever and ever.

The young man is saved, for he loves the gospel. He will not go to hear anything but the gospel. He sticks to the truth, he knows the unadulterated milk of the Word, and he cannot be deceived and led astray with false doctrine, for that he hates. He does not gad about to go and hear this and that, but he knows what has saved his soul, and he holds fast the form of sound words. The young man is safe.

I know he is safe, for he is very humble. He is not perfect yet : he does not say that he is, nor boast of his attainments. He does not want to be the forehorse of the team, he is willing to be placed anywhere so that he can be useful. He often wonders that he is a Christian at all, and ascribes it all to divine grace. He is a lowly young man, and therefore he is safe enough, for such the Lord preserveth.

Moreover, he is very diffident of himself. He is afraid sometimes to put one foot before another for fear he should take a wrong step. He is always going on his knees to ask for direction ; he waits upon God for guidance, and does not dare to do anything without the direction of the word and the Spirit. He is a prayerful man, and therefore he is safe ; for who can hurt the man who dwells at the mercy-seat ? He is also a very careful man in his daily walk. He labours to be obedient to the will of God, he aims at being holy, and to be holy is to be safe.

Worldlings say that he is a cant and a hypocrite, and thus they have set their stamp on him, and marked him as a follower of the despised Redeemer. He is a genuine character, or else they would not persecute him. The people of God love him, and he loves them, and he dwells among them, and says of the house of God,

“ Here my best friends, my kindred dwell,
Here God my Saviour reigns.”

Write home to his father and all his friends, and say, “ The young man is safe.” He is in Christ, and he is in Christ’s church, and he is seeking to serve God. He is beginning to work for the Master, he is trying to bring souls to Jesus ; the Holy Spirit is working in him and by him to the glory of God. Yes, he is safe enough, for he is “ Safe in the arms of Jesus.”

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm xc.

HYMNS FROM “ OUR OWN HYMN BOOK ”—90, 566, and “ Safe in the arms of Jesus ” (25 “ Flowers and Fruits.”)

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

J E S U S.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 15TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAOLE, NEWINGTON.

"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus : for he shall save his people from their sins."—Matthew i. 21.

BERNARD has delightfully said that the name of Jesus is honey in the mouth, melody in the ear, and joy in the heart.* I rejoice in that expression on my own account, for it gives me my share of the delight, and leads me to hope that, while I am speaking, the sweetness of the precious name of Jesus may fill my own mouth. Here also is a portion for you who are listening : it is melody in the ear. If my voice should be harsh, and my words discordant, you will yet have music of the choicest order, for the name itself is essential melody, and my whole sermon will ring with its silver note. May both speaker and hearer join in the third word of Bernard's sentence, and may we all find it to be joy in our hearts, a jubilee within our souls. Jesus is the way to God, therefore will we preach him ; he is the truth, therefore will we hear of him ; he is the life, therefore shall our hearts rejoice in him.

So inexpressibly fragrant is the name of Jesus that it imparts a delicious perfume to everything which comes in connection with it. Our thoughts will turn this morning to the first use of the name in connection with our Lord, when the child who was yet to be born was named Jesus. Here we find everything suggestive of comfort. The person to whom that name was first revealed was Joseph, a carpenter, a humble man, a working man, unknown and undistinguished save by the justice of his character. To the artizan of Nazareth was this name first imparted. It is not, therefore, a title to be monopolised by the ears of princes, sages, priests, warriors, or men of wealth : it is a name to be made a household word among common people. He is the people's Christ ; for of old it was said of him, "I have exalted one chosen out of the people." Let every carpenter, and every worker of every sort, rejoice with all other sorts of men in the name of Jesus. There is consolation in the messenger

* *Nomen Jesu est mel in ore, melos in aure, et jubilum in corde.*
No. 1,484.

who made known that name to Joseph; for it was the angel of the Lord who, in the visions of the night, whispered that charming name into his ear; and henceforth angels are in league with men, and gather to one standard, moved by the same watchword as ourselves—the name of Jesus. Did God send the name by an angel, and did the angel delight to come with it? Then is there a bond of sympathy between us and angelic spirits, and we are come this day not only “to the general assembly and church of the firstborn,” but “to an innumerable company of angels,” by whom that name is regarded with reverent love.

Nor is the condition of Joseph when he heard this name altogether without instruction. The angel spake to him in a dream: that name is so soft and sweet that it breaks no man’s rest, but rather yields a peace unrivalled, the peace of God. With such a dream Joseph’s sleep was more blessed than his waking. The name has evermore this power, for, to those who know it, it unveils a glory brighter than dreams have ever imaged. Under its power young men see visions, and old men dream dreams, and these do not mock them, but are prophecies faithful and true. The name of Jesus brings before our minds a vision of glory in the latter days when Jesus shall reign from pole to pole, and yet another vision of glory unutterable when his people shall be with him where he is. The name of Jesus was sweet at the first, because of the words with which it was accompanied; for they were meant to remove perplexity from Joseph’s mind, and some of them ran thus—“Fear not.” Truly, no name can banish fear like the name of Jesus: it is the beginning of hope and the end of despair. Let but the sinner hear of “the Saviour,” and he forgets to die, he hopes to live; he rises out of the deadly lethargy of his hopelessness, and, looking upward, he sees a reconciled God, and fears no longer. Especially, brethren, this name is full of rare delights when we meditate upon the infinite preciousness of the person to whom it was assigned. Ah, here is a Jonathan’s wood dripping with honey from every bough, and he that tasteth it shall have his eyes enlightened. We have no common Saviour, for neither earth nor heaven could produce his equal. At the time when the name was given his full person had not been seen by mortal eyes, for he lay as yet concealed; but soon he came forth, having been born of Mary by the power of the Holy Ghost, a matchless man. He bears our nature, but not our corruption; he was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, but yet in his flesh there is no sin. This Holy One is the Son of God, and yet he is the Son of man: this surpassing excellence of nature makes his name most precious.

I shall ask the exercise of your patience while I consider seven things in reference to this transporting name. It is as ointment poured forth, and its scent is varied so as to contain the essence of all fragrances. These seven things will be seen very plainly by you if you continue to look at the text and its connection.

I. First, we shall remark that **THE NAME OF JESUS IS A NAME DIVINELY ORDERED AND EXPOUNDED.** According to the text, the angel brought a message from the Lord, and said, “Thou shalt call his name Jesus.” It is a name which, like him who bears it, has come down from heaven. Our Lord has other names of office and relationship, but this is specially and peculiarly his own personal name, and it is the Father who hath thus named him. Rest assured, therefore, that

it is *the best name* that he could bear. God would not have given him a name of secondary value, or about which there would be a trace of dishonour. The name is the highest, brightest, and noblest of names; it is the glory of our Lord to be a Saviour. To the best that was ever born of woman God has given the best name that any son of man could bear. *Jesus is the most appropriate name* that our Lord could receive. Of this we are quite certain, for the Father knew all about him, and could name him well. He knows much more about the Lord Christ than all saints and angels put together, for "No man knoweth the Son but the Father." To perfection the Father knew him, and he names him Jesus. We may be sure, then, that our Lord is most of all a Saviour, and is best described by that term; God, the Father, who knows him best, sees this to be his grand characteristic, that he is a Saviour, and is best represented by the name "Jesus." Since infinite wisdom has selected it, we may be sure that it is *a name which must be true*, and must be verified by facts of no mean order. God, who cannot be under a mistake, calls him Jesus, a Saviour, and therefore Jesus, a Saviour, he must be upon a grand scale, continually, abundantly, and in a most apparent manner. Neither will God refuse to accept the work which he has done, since by the gift of that name he has commissioned him to save sinners. When we plead the name of Jesus before God, we bring him back his own word, and appeal to him by his own act and deed. Is not the name of Jesus to be viewed with reverential delight by each one of us, when we recollect whence it came? He is not a Saviour of our own setting up, but God the everlasting Father hath set him forth for our deliverer and Saviour, saying, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus."

It is a name which the Holy Ghost explains, for he tells us the reason for the name of Jesus—"For he shall save his people from their sins." "Saviour" is the meaning of the name, but it has a fuller sense hidden within, for in its Hebrew form it means "the salvation of the Lord," or "the Lord of salvation," or "the Saviour." The angel interprets it, "he shall save," and the word for "he" is very emphatic. According to many scholars, the divine name, the incommunicable title of the Most High is contained in "Joshua," the Hebrew form of Jesus, so that in full the word means "Jehovah Saviour," and in brief it signifies "Saviour." It is given to our Lord because "he saves"—not according to any temporary and common salvation, from enemies and troubles, but he saves from spiritual enemies, and specially from sins. Joshua of old was a saviour, Gideon was a saviour, David was a saviour; but the title is given to our Lord above all others because he is a Saviour in a sense in which no one else is or can be,—he saves his people from their sins. The Jews were looking for a Saviour; they expected one who would break the Roman yoke, and save them from being under bondage to a foreign power, but our divine Lord came not for such a purpose, he came to be a Saviour of a more spiritual sort, and to break quite another yoke, by saving his people from their sins. The word "save" is very rich in meaning, its full and exact force can hardly be given in English words. Jesus is salvation in the sense of deliverance and also in that of preservation. He gives health, he is all that is salutary to his people: in the fullest and broadest sense he saves his people. The original word means to preserve, to keep, to protect from danger, and

to secure. The grandest meanings generally dwell in the shortest words, and in this case the word "save" is a well where the plummet is long in finding a bottom. Jesus brings a great salvation, or as Paul saith "so great salvation," as if he felt that he could never estimate its greatness (Heb. ii. 3): he also speaks of it as "eternal salvation" (Heb. v. 9), even as Isaiah said, "Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation." Glorious beyond measure is the name "Jesus" as it is divinely expounded to us, for by that very exposition the eternal God guarantees the success of the Saviour: he declares that he shall save his people, and save his people he must. God himself sets him forth to us as—

"Jesus, Saviour, Son of God,
Bearer of the sinner's load."

Thus we have a name, dear friends, which we have not even to explain for ourselves. As we did not choose it, so we are not left to expound it: God who gave the text has preached us the sermon. He who appointed the name has given us the reason for it, so that we are not left in ignorance or uncertainty. We might have said, "Yes, his name is Jesus, but it refers to a salvation which was wrought in the olden ages;" but no, the word of the Lord tells us "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins;" and this is for all time, since he always has a people, and these people evermore need to be saved from their sins. Let us be glad that we have such a Saviour, and that the name of Jesus retains all the sweetness and power it ever had, and shall retain it till all the chosen people are saved, and then for ever and ever.

Moreover, in addition to expounding this name, the Holy Spirit, by the evangelist Matthew, has been pleased to refer us to the synonym of it, and so to give us its meaning by comparison. Let me read you the next verses. "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." If when our Lord was born and named "Jesus" the old prophecy which said that he should be called Emmanuel was fulfilled, it follows that the name "Jesus" bears a signification tantamount to that of "Emmanuel," and that its virtual meaning is "God with us." Indeed, brethren, he is Jesus, the Saviour, because he is Emmanuel, God with us; and as soon as he was born, and so became Emmanuel, the incarnate God, he became by that very fact Jesus, the Saviour. By coming down from heaven into this earth, and taking upon himself our nature, he bridged the otherwise bridgeless gulf between God and man: by suffering in that human nature and imparting through his divine nature an infinite efficacy to those sufferings he removed that which would have destroyed us, and brought us everlasting life and salvation. O Jesus, dearest of all names in earth or in heaven, I love thy music all the better because it is in such sweet harmony with another which rings melodiously in my ears, the name Emmanuel, God with us. Our Saviour is *God*, and therefore able; he is God *with us*, and therefore pitiful; he is divine, and therefore infinitely wise; but he is human, and therefore full of compassion.

This, then, is our first head: this charming name of Jesus is a jewel from the casket of heaven. It comes to us as an apple of gold, and it is attended by an exposition which places it in a basket of silver. The name is precious as the golden mercy-seat, and over it burns the light of the divine glory, so that we may not stumble at it, but may rejoice in the great light. It lets us know the very heart of God in reference to his Son: why he sent him, what he meant him to be and to do, and in what manner he would glorify him. Salvation is the joyful sound which rings from the bells of our High Priest's garment as he comes forth to bless us. God, who spake to our fathers by his prophets, now speaks to us by his Son, whose name is Salvation. Is there not a mint of joy in this?

II. Secondly, although this name was thus chosen by God, OUR LORD WAS ACTUALLY CALLED BY THE NAME OF JESUS BY MAN. To this I call your special notice. "She (Mary) shall bring forth a son, and thou (Joseph) shalt call his name Jesus." The God of heaven by his angel appoints the child's name, but his reputed father must announce it. Both Joseph and Mary, according to the divine command, united in calling the child by the appointed name. See, then, that the name which is chosen of God is fully accepted by instructed men. Those who are taught of God joyfully recognise that Christ is salvation, and without a question give him the well-beloved name of Jesus, the Saviour.

Here note that the name Jesus, Saviour, was given to our Lord by two simple hearts as soon as ever he was revealed to them. They only needed to be told who he was, and what he was come for, how he was born, and what was the object of his incarnation, and they at once accepted the divine message, and named the babe by the name of Jesus. And, brethren, all of us to whom Christ is revealed at all, call him Jesus the Saviour. Many there be who think they know our Lord, but since they only speak of him as a prophet, a teacher, or a leader, and care not for him as a Saviour, we are clear that they are in ignorance as to his chief character. His first name, his personal name, they know not. The Holy Spirit cannot have revealed Christ to any man if that man remains ignorant of his saving power. He who does not know him as Jesus, the Saviour, does not know him at all. Certain anti-Christian Christians are craftily extolling Christ that they may smite Jesus: I mean that they cry up Jesus as Messiah, sent of God, to exhibit a grand example and supply a pure code of morals, but they cannot endure Jesus as a Saviour, redeeming us by his blood, and by his death delivering us from sin. I am not sure that they follow his example of holy living, but they are very loud in extolling it, and all with the purpose of drawing off men's thoughts from the chief character and main object of our Lord's sojourn among us, namely, the deliverance of his people from sin. If men knew our Lord they would call him Jesus the Saviour, and regard him not merely as a good man, a great teacher, a noble exemplar, but as the Saviour of sinners.

Now, Joseph and Mary not only believed, so as to give the young child the name in their own minds, but in due time they took him up to the temple to be circumcised according to the law, and there publicly his name was called Jesus. All hearts to whom God commits his Christ should publicly own him in the most solemn manner according to his

ordinance, and should desire in all proper places to confess him as the Saviour. The infant Christ was committed to the care of Joseph and Mary, to nurse and protect. Wonder of wonders, that HE should need a guardian who is the Preserver of men and the Shepherd of his saints! In his feebleness as a babe he needed parental care; and in caring for him Joseph and Mary did not hesitate to avow their faith by giving him a name which indicated his destiny, nor did they refuse to publish his name in the temple before the priests and the congregation. Now in a certain sense Christ is committed to the keeping of all his people. This day a charge to keep we have; we are to preserve his gospel in the world, to maintain his truth, and to publish his salvation, and therefore we are bound to bear this testimony, that he is Jesus, the Saviour of sinners. This we must make very prominent. Others shall say what they please about him, and if they speak well of his character in any respect we will be glad that they shall do it, however little they may know: but this is our peculiar testimony, that our Lord saves from sin. Nothing is more prominent about a man than his name; we can hardly mention him without pronouncing his name, and so we feel that we cannot mention our Lord without speaking of salvation. If he be anything he is Jesus, the Saviour; we know him best by that name. We preach unto men Jesus; we insist upon it first and foremost that he is the sinner's Saviour. He is righteous and loveth righteousness, but he is first known to men as the friend of sinners. He is the faithful and true witness, the prince of the kings of the earth, but his first work is to save; after that he teaches and rules his saved ones. Sunken in sin, men need to be redeemed from that tremendous evil and the wrath consequent thereon, and this awful need is met by Jesus, the Saviour.

So, beloved, you see that the name chosen of God is given to him by all those who know him, and to whom his gospel is entrusted, and given heartily, zealously, boldly. Yes, all of us call him Jesus if we know him, and we are resolved to publish his name abroad as long as we live. If he was Jesus in the cradle, what is he now that he is exalted in the heavens? As Emmanuel, God with us, his very incarnation made him Jesus, the Saviour of men: but what shall I say of him now that beyond his incarnation we have his atonement, and above his atonement his resurrection, and beyond that his ascension, and, to crown all, his perpetual intercession? How grandly does the title befit him now that he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them! If in the arms of the Virgin he is the Saviour, what is he on the throne of God? If wrapped in swaddling bands he is Jesus, what is he now that the heavens have received him? If in the workshop of Nazareth, and sitting in the temple among the doctors, he was the child Jesus, the Saviour, what is he now that his infancy and childhood are over, and he is exalted far above all principalities and powers? If he was Jesus when on the cross, presenting himself as an offering for his people, what is he now that he hath by one sacrifice perfected for ever them that are set apart? What is he now that he sits at the right hand of God, expecting till his enemies are made his footstool? Let us all unite in calling our Lord by this tender human name of Jesus. Are we not his mother and sister and brother? Did

he not call all believers by these endearing titles? Then we, too, will call him Jesus—

“Jesus, name all names above ; Jesus best and nearest,
 Jesus, fount of perfect love, holiest, tenderest, dearest :
 Jesus, source of grace completed ; Jesus holiest, sweetest,
 Jesus, Saviour all divine, thine's the name, and only thine.”

III. THE NAME HAD BEEN TYPICALLY WORN BY ANOTHER, BUT IS NOW RESERVED FOR HIM ALONE. There had been a Jesus before our Jesus. I allude to Joshua, and you know that in our version the name Jesus is twice used where Joshua is really meant. The first is Acts vii. 4, 5, where we read of the fathers who entered in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, evidently meaning Joshua ; and the second in Hebrews iv. 8, “If Jesus had given them rest.” Joshua is the Hebrew form and Jesus the Greek form, but Jesus and Joshua are the same word. There was one, then, of old, who bore this famous name of Jesus, or Joshua, and was a type of our Jesus. What did Joshua do? When Moses could not lead the people into Canaan, Joshua did it ; and so our Jesus accomplishes what the law never could have done. Joshua overcame the enemies of God's people : though they were very many and very strong, and had cities walled to heaven and chariots of iron, yet in the name of Jehovah, as captain of the Lord's host, Joshua smote them. Even so doth our glorious Joshua smite our sins and all the powers of darkness, and utterly destroy our spiritual enemies. Before him Amalek is smitten, Jericho falls, and Canaanites are put to rout, while he giveth us to triumph in every place. Moreover Joshua conquered an inheritance for Israel, took them across the Jordan, settled them in a land that flowed with milk and honey, and gave to each tribe and to each man to stand in his lot which God had ordained for him. Precisely this is what our Jesus does, only our inheritance is more divine, and on each one of us it is more surely entailed. Though Joshua could not give to the people the heavenly Sabbatismos, or rest of the highest kind, yet he gave them rest most pleasant to them, so that every man sat under his own vine and fig tree, none making him afraid ; but our glorious Joshua has given us infinite, eternal rest, for he is our peace, and they that know him have entered into rest. Joshua, the son of Nun, caused the people to serve the Lord all his days, but he could not save the nation from their sins, for after his death they grievously went astray : our Joshua preserves to himself a people zealous for good works, for he ever liveth and is able to keep them from falling. No more doth Joshua lift sword or spear on behalf of Israel, but Jesus still rideth forth, conquering and to conquer, and all his people have victory through his blood. Well is his name called Jesus.

We read of another Jesus in the books of Ezra and Zechariah. The form which the word there takes is Jeshua or Joshua. He was the high priest who came at the head of the people on their return from Babylon. He is spoken of by the prophet Zechariah in terms which make him a fit representative of each of us. But, behold, Jesus of Nazareth is now the only high priest ; and having presented his one sacrifice for ever, he remains a priest according to the power of an endless life. He heads the march from Babylon, and he leads his people back to Jerusalem.

The name of Jesus was not at all uncommon among the Jews. Josephus mentions no less than twelve persons of the name of Jesus. Salvation of a certain kind was so longed for by the Jews that their eagerness was seen in their children's names. Their little ones were by their hopes named as saviours, but saviours they were not. How common are nominal saviours! "Lo here," they say, "here is a saviour": "Lo, there," they cry, "another saviour." These have the name but not the power, and now, according to the text, Jesus Christ has engrossed the title for himself. His name shall be called Jesus, for he alone is a Prince and a Saviour, and truly saves his people from their sins. Other saviours do but mock the hopes of mankind: they promise fairly, but they utterly deceive: this holy child, this blessed, glorious God with us, has truly brought us salvation, and he saith, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth, for I am God, and beside me there is none else." This Jesus of Nazareth, the King of kings, is the one and only Saviour. He, and none but he, shall save his people. He shall save by his own act and deed, he and not another. Singly and alone he shall save his people. Personally, and not by another, in his name and on his behalf, he shall, by himself, purge away sin. He shall do all the work, and leave none undone: he shall begin it, carry it on, and complete it, and therefore is his name called Jesus, because he shall completely and perfectly save his people from their sins. The name has been, in a minor sense, applied to others aforetime, but now none else may wear it, since there is no other Saviour, and none other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved.

IV. The fourth point grows out of the wording of the text. **THIS NAME JESUS IDENTIFIES OUR LORD WITH HIS PEOPLE.** "Thou shalt call his name Jesus," for that name declares his relation to his people. It is to them that he is a Saviour. He would not be Jesus if he had not a people: he could not be, for there could be no Saviour if there were none to be saved, and there could be no Saviour from sin if there were no sinners. Notice, dear friends, the all-important connection here revealed between our Lord and his people, since his very name hangs on it: his proper, personal name has no meaning apart from his people.

"He shall save *his* people." It does not say God's people, for then it would have been understood as meaning only the Jews: or it would have been supposed to refer to some good and holy persons who belonged to God, apart from the Mediator; but "he shall save *his* people"—those who are his own, and personally belong to him. These are evidently a very peculiar people, a people set apart as Christ's own treasure; they are a people that belong to God incarnate—Emmanuel's people. These he saves. Who are they but his elect, whom his Father gave him or ever the earth was? Who are they but those whose names are graven on the palms of his hands and written on his heart? Who are they but those for whom he counted down the price of redemption? Who are they but those for whom he became a surety, whose smart he has borne? Who are they but the numbered sheep that will be required at his hands by the great Father, that he should render them back by tale and number, saying, "I have kept those whom thou hast given me, for they are thine." Yes, the Lord knoweth them that are his, and he preserves them unto his eternal kingdom and glory. "He shall save

his people." Do you not see that this name of Jesus is an election name after all? It is a wide, far-reaching name, to sinners dear, to sinners given; but still in the depths of its meaning it has a special bearing upon a chosen people; it has a ring of sovereignty about it, and is all the sweeter because of this to those who see in their own salvation an exhibition of distinguishing grace.

Now the question arises, who are his people? We are eager to know who they are; and we are glad to find that his people, be they who they may, need to be saved, and shall be saved, for it is written, "*He shall save his people.*" It is not said, "he shall reward his people for their righteousness," nor is it promised that he shall "save them from becoming sinners," but "*he shall save his people from their sins.*" Do you want saving, brethren? Has the Holy Ghost taught you that you need salvation? Let your hearts be encouraged. This is the character of all his people; he never had a chosen one who could do without washing in the Saviour's blood. If you are righteous in yourself you are not one of his people. If you were never sick in soul you are none of the folk that the Great Physician has come to heal: if you were never guilty of sin you are none of those whom he has come to deliver from sin. Jesus comes on no needless errand, and undertakes no unnecessary work: if you feel yourselves to need saving then cast yourselves upon him, for such as you are he came to save.

Notice, yet again, the very gracious but startling fact that our Lord's connection with his people lies in the direction of their sins. This is amazing condescension. He is called Saviour in connection with his people, but it is in reference to their sins, because it is from their sins that they need to be saved. If they had never sinned they would never have required a Saviour, and there would have been no name of Jesus known on earth. That is a wonderful text—did you ever meditate upon it?—"Who gave himself for our sins according to the Scriptures." As Martin Luther says, he never gave himself for our righteousness, but he did give himself for our sins. Sin is a horrible evil, a deadly poison, yet it is this which gives Jesus his title when he overcomes it. What a wonder to think upon! The first link between my soul and Christ is, not my goodness, but my badness; not my merit, but my misery; not my standing, but my falling; not my riches, but my need. He comes to visit his people, yet not to admire their beauties, but to remove their deformities; not to reward their virtues, but to forgive their sins. O ye sinners, I mean real sinners, not you that call yourselves so because you are told you are such, but you who feel yourselves to be guilty before God, here is good news for you. O you self-condemned sinners, who feel that if you ever get salvation Jesus must bring it to you and be the beginning and the end of it, I pray you rejoice in this dear, this precious, this blessed name, for Jesus has come to save you, even you. Go to him as sinners, call him "Jesus," and cry, "O Lord Jesus, be Jesus to me, for I need thy salvation." Doubt not that he will fulfil his own name and exhibit his power in you. Only confess to him your sin, and he will save you from it. Only believe in him, and he will be your salvation.

V. The fifth point is very clear, and well worthy of note. THE NAME OF "JESUS" IS ONE WHICH INDICATES HIS MAIN WORK. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for *he shall save.*" He shall save from sin.

Why do men write lives of Christ who know nothing about his main business and object? Why do some preach about Christ who do not know the very essence and heart of him? Think of knowing Milton, but not as a poet, and Bacon, but not as a philosopher! There is no knowing our Lord, if he be not known as a Saviour; for he is that or nothing. Those who fall short of his salvation do not even know his name; how, then, should they know his person? His name is not called Jesus because he is our exemplar, though indeed he is perfection itself, and we long to tread in his footsteps; but his name is called Jesus because he has come to save that which is lost. He is Christ, too, or the anointed, but then he is Christ Jesus; that is to say, it is as a Saviour that he is anointed. He is nothing if he be not a Saviour. He is anointed to this very end. His very name is a sham if he do not save his people from their sins.

Now, Jesus doth save his people from sin; for, first, he doth it by taking all the sins of his people upon himself. Do you think that a strong expression? It is warranted by the Scriptures. "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Christ's shoulders bore the the guilt of his people, and because he took their load his people are free, and have henceforth no burden of sin to weigh them down. He saves his people through his personal substitution, by standing in their stead and suffering in their place. There is none other way of salvation but by his vicarious sufferings and death.

Then he saves them by bearing the penalty due to their sin. Where the sin lies the penalty falls. "The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." "He was made a curse for us." "Christ also hath suffered for us." He died, "the just for the unjust, to bring us to God." He bore the wrath of God which was due to us. He has taken the sin and paid the penalty, and now cavillers come in and falsely say that we teach that a man is to believe the dogma of atonement and then he is saved, and may live as he likes. They know better; they know that they misrepresent us, for we always teach that this great work of substitution and penalty-bearing by Christ works in the person who partakes in its benefits, love to God, gratitude to Christ, and consequent hatred of all sin; *and this change of heart is the very core and essence of salvation.* This is how Christ saves his people from their sin—by rescuing them, by the force of his love, out of the power, tyranny, and dominion of sins, which hitherto had the mastery over them. I knew what it was to strive against sin as a moral person, seeking to overcome it, but I found myself mastered by sin, like Samson when his hair was lost, and the Philistines bound him; but since I have believed in Jesus I find motives for being holy which are more influential with me than any I knew before; I find weapons with which to fight my sin that I never knew how to handle before, and a new strength has been given me of the Holy Spirit. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith"; this is the power which drives out the vipers of sin from the soul,—the precious blood of Jesus. He that hath believed in Jesus as his expiation and atonement becomes thereby, through the power of the Holy Ghost, renewed in heart; he has fresh objects set him, fresh motives sway him, and thus Jesus saves his people from their sins.

Beloved, if we had space at this time I should like to speak about how completely Christ saves his people from their sins, how when he comes in he turns out the strong man armed with mighty force, how that strong man armed seeks to come back again, and does, as far as he can, gain a partial entrance, but Jesus drives him out again ; how all the damage and foulness that were left within the house by the old tenant are gradually cleared away by Jesus, till at last his people are fully sanctified as temples of the living God. His saints shall be without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, and no sign that ever the devil dwelt within them shall remain upon them. Viewing each one of their risen bodies as a temple of God, you shall search those bodies through and not find a trace of the dominion of sin ; you shall look into the heart, into the mind, into the understanding, but when Jesus has done his purging work there shall be no scar or speck to show that ever sin was there. So completely shall he save his people from their sins that they shall be fit to dwell with angels ; better,—they shall be fit to dwell with God : better than that, they shall be one with Jesus, one with him throughout eternity, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. How glorious, how transcendent is the salvation which Jehovah Jesus has brought to us !

VI. THIS NAME OF JESUS IS ONE WHICH IS COMPLETELY JUSTIFIED BY FACTS. It was given him before he had done anything : while yet he was a babe, or ever his trembling feet had learned to tread the cottage floor at Nazareth, he was Jesus the Saviour. But is the name well deserved ? Many a child has had a grand name, and his life has contradicted it. I recollect a grave on which there is the name of a child, “Sacred to the memory of Methusaleh Coney, who died aged six months.” His parents were mightily mistaken when they called him Methusaleh. Many other names are equally inappropriate, and are proved to be so in the course of years. But this Jesus is a Saviour, a true Jesus. He bears a name which he well deserves. Come to the Christ and see there the many that once rioted in sin, and rolled in the mire, but they are washed, but they are sanctified, and now they rejoice in holiness. Who purified them ? Who but Jesus ? He that saves his people from their sins has saved them. Go ye to dying-beds, and hear saints telling of his love, and speaking of the heaven which is already dawning in their souls. Some of these once could sit on the ale-bench, and use the swearer’s oath, but Jesus has cleansed them. Climb ye up to heaven, and behold the snow-white host, glittering like the sun in spotless purity. I ask them whence came they ? The reply is that they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. It is most true that Jesus saves his people from their sins—earth knows it, hell howls at it, and heaven chants it ; time has seen it, and eternity shall reveal it. There is none like to Jesus in saving power. All glory be to him ! When he shall come from heaven with a shout, and all his hosts shall be with him, when the day of the supper of the Lamb shall come, and the bride hath made herself ready, and she that is the queen all glorious within, wearing her raiment of wrought gold, shall sit down at the table of God with her glorious husband—then shall it be seen that he has saved his church, his people, from their sins.

VII. Last of all, THIS NAME IS CHRIST’S PERSONAL NAME FOR EVER.

It is a home name. It is the name his father gave him, it is the name his mother gave him—Jesus, the child Jesus. We also belong to his family; for he that believeth in him is his father, and mother, and sister, and brother, and that most dear and familiar name by which he was known at home is ever in our mouths. He is the Lord, and we worship him; but he is Jesus, and we love him. Jesus is also the heart name, and is full of the music of love. They who loved him best gave him the name, especially his mother, who pondered everything about him in her heart. It is the name which moves our affections, and fires our souls.

“Jesus, the very thought of thee
With sweetness fills my breast.”

Let your hearts go out towards him in tender union. Jesus is his death name;—Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, was written on his cross. That is his resurrection name. That is his gospel name, which we preach. It is the name which Peter preached to the Gentiles when he said, “This is Jesus of Nazareth by whom is preached to you the remission of sins.” And this, beloved, is his heaven name. They sing to him there as Jesus. See how it concludes the Bible. Read the Revelation, and read its songs, and see how they worship Jesus the Lamb of God. Let us go and tell of this name; let us continually meditate upon it; let us love it henceforth and for ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hebrews i. and ii.

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ADOPTION—THE SPIRIT AND THE CRY.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 22ND, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAOLE, NEWINGTON.

“And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”—Galatians iv. 6.

WE do not find the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity set forth in Scripture in formal terms, such as those which are employed in the Athanasian creed; but the truth is continually taken for granted, as if it were a fact well known in the church of God. If not laid down very often, in so many words, it is everywhere held in solution, and it is mentioned incidentally, in connection with other truths in a way which renders it quite as distinct as if it were expressed in a set formula. In many passages it is brought before us so prominently that we must be wilfully blind if we do not note it. In the present chapter, for instance, we have distinct mention of each of the three divine Persons. “God,” that is the Father, “sent forth the Spirit,” that is the Holy Spirit; and he is here called “the Spirit of his Son.” Nor have we the names alone, for each sacred person is mentioned as acting in the work of our salvation: see the fourth verse, “God *sent forth* his Son”; then note the fifth verse, which speaks of the Son as *redeeming* them that were under the law; and then the text itself reveals the Spirit as coming into the hearts of believers, and *crying* Abba, Father. Now, inasmuch, as you have not only the mention of the separate names, but also certain special operations ascribed to each, it is plain that you have here the distinct personality of each. Neither the Father, the Son, nor the Spirit can be an influence, or a mere form of existence, for each one acts in a divine manner, but with a special sphere and a distinct mode of operation. The error of regarding a certain divine person as a mere influence, or emanation, mainly assails the Holy Ghost; but its falseness is seen in the words—“crying, Abba, Father”: an influence could not cry; the act requires a person to perform it. Though we may not understand the wonderful truth of the undivided Unity, and the distinct personality of the Triune Godhead, yet, nevertheless, we see the truth revealed in the Holy Scriptures: and, therefore, we accept it as a matter of faith.

No. 1,435.

The divinity of each of these sacred persons is also to be gathered from the text and its connection. We do not doubt the divinity of the Father, for he is here distinctly mentioned as "God": twice is the Father evidently intended when the word "God" is used. That the Son is God is implied, for though made of a woman, as to his human nature, he is described as "sent forth" and, therefore, he was pre-existent before he was sent forth and made of a woman; this, together with his being called the Son of God, and his being spoken of as able to redeem, are to our minds sufficient proofs of deity. The Spirit is said to do what only God can do, namely, to dwell in the hearts of all believers. It were not possible for any being to cry in the hearts of a multitude of men if he were not omnipresent and therefore divine. So that we have the name of each divine Person, the working of each, the personality of each, and in some degree the deity of each, within the compass of a few lines. As for believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, they know how needful is the co-operation of the entire Trinity to our salvation, and they are charmed to see the loving union of all in the work of deliverance. We reverence the Father, without whom we had not been chosen or adopted: the Father who hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. We love and reverence the Son by whose most precious blood we have been redeemed, and with whom we are one in a mystic and everlasting union: and we adore and love the divine Spirit, for it is by him that we have been regenerated, illuminated, quickened, preserved, and sanctified; and it is through him that we receive the seal and witness within our hearts, by which we are assured that we are indeed the sons of God. As God said of old, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," even so do the divine Persons take counsel together, and all unite in the new creation of the believer. We must not fail to bless, adore, and love each one of the exalted Persons, but we must diligently bow in lowliest reverence before the one God—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."

Having noted this most important fact, let us come to the text itself, hoping to enjoy the doctrine of the Trinity while we are discoursing upon our adoption, in which wonder of grace they each have a share. Under the teaching of the divine Spirit may we be drawn into sweet communion with the Father through his Son Jesus Christ, to his glory and to our benefit.

Three things are very clearly set forth in my text: the first is *the dignity of believers*—"ye are sons;" the second is *the consequent indwelling of the Holy Ghost*—"because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts;" and the third is *the filial cry*—crying, "Abba, Father."

I. First, then, **THE DIGNITY OF BELIEVERS.** Adoption gives us the rights of children, regeneration gives us the nature of children: we are partakers of both of these, for we are sons.

And let us here observe that *this sonship is a gift of grace received by faith.* We are not the sons of God by nature in the sense here meant. We are in a sense "the offspring of God" by nature, but this is very different from the sonship here described, which is the peculiar privilege of those

who are born again. The Jews claimed to be of the family of God, but as their privileges came to them by the way of their fleshly birth, they are likened to Ishmael, who was born after the flesh, but who was cast out as the son of the bondwoman, and compelled to give way to the son of the promise. We have a sonship which does not come to us by nature, for we are "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Our sonship comes by promise, by the operation of God as a special gift to a peculiar seed, set apart unto the Lord by his own sovereign grace, as Isaac was. This honour and privilege come to us, according to the connection of our text, by faith. Note well the twenty-sixth verse of the preceding chapter (Gal. iii. 26): "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." As unbelievers we know nothing of adoption. While we are under the law as self-righteous we know something of servitude, but we know nothing of sonship. It is only after that faith has come that we cease to be under the schoolmaster, and rise out of our minority to take the privileges of the sons of God.

Faith worketh in us the spirit of adoption, and our consciousness of sonship, in this wise: first, *it brings us justification*. Verse twenty-four of the previous chapter says, "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." An unjustified man stands in the condition of a criminal, not of a child: his sin is laid to his charge, he is reckoned as unjust and unrighteous, as indeed he really is, and he is therefore a rebel against his king, and not a child enjoying his father's love. But when faith realizes the cleansing power of the blood of atonement, and lays hold upon the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus, then the justified man becomes a son and a child. Justification and adoption always go together. "Whom he called them he also justified," and the calling is a call to the Father's house, and to a recognition of sonship. Believing brings forgiveness and justification through our Lord Jesus; it also brings adoption, for it is written, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."

Faith brings us into the realization of our adoption in the next place *by setting us free from the bondage of the law*. "After that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster." When we groaned under a sense of sin, and were shut up by it as in a prison, we feared that the law would punish us for our iniquity, and our life was made bitter with fear. Moreover, we strove in our own blind self-sufficient manner to keep that law, and this brought us into yet another bondage, which became harder and harder as failure succeeded to failure: we sinned and stumbled more and more to our soul's confusion. But now that faith has come we see the law fulfilled in Christ, and ourselves justified and accepted in him: this changes the slave into a child, and duty into choice. Now we delight in the law, and by the power of the Spirit we walk in holiness to the glory of God. Thus it is that by believing in Christ Jesus we escape from Moses, the taskmaster, and come to Jesus, the Saviour; we cease to regard God as an angry Judge and view him as our loving Father. The system of merit and command, and punishment and fear, has given way to the rule of grace, gratitude, and love, and this new principle of government is one of the grand privileges of the children of God.

Now, *faith is the mark of sonship in all who have it, whoever they may be*, for "ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. iii. 26). If you are believing in Jesus, whether you are Jew or Gentile, bond or free, you are a son of God. If you have only believed in Christ of late, and have but for the past few weeks been able to rest in his great salvation, yet, beloved, now are you a child of God. It is not an after privilege, granted to assurance or growth in grace; it is an early blessing, and belongs to him who has the smallest degree of faith, and is no more than a babe in grace. If a man be a believer in Jesus Christ his name is in the register-book of the great family above, "for ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." But if you have no faith, no matter what zeal, no matter what works, no matter what knowledge, no matter what pretensions to holiness you may possess, you are nothing, and your religion is vain. Without faith in Christ you are as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal, for without faith it is impossible to please God. Faith then, wherever it is found, is the infallible token of a child of God, and its absence is fatal to the claim.

This according to the apostle is further illustrated by our baptism, for in baptism, if there be faith in the soul, there is an open putting on of the Lord Jesus Christ. Read the twenty-seventh verse: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." In baptism you professed to be dead to the world and you were therefore buried into the name of Jesus: and the meaning of that burial, if it had any right meaning to you, was that you professed yourself henceforth to be dead to everything but Christ, and henceforth your life was to be in him, and you were to be as one raised from the dead to newness of life. Of course the outward form avails nothing to the unbeliever, but to the man who is in Christ it is a most instructive ordinance. The spirit and essence of the ordinance lie in the soul's entering into the symbol, in the man's knowing not alone the baptism into water, but the baptism into the Holy Ghost and into fire: and as many of you as know that inward mystic baptism into Christ know also that henceforth you have put on Christ and are covered by him as a man is by his garment. Henceforth you are one in Christ, you wear his name, you live in him, you are saved by him, you are altogether his. Now, if you are one with Christ, since he is a son, you are sons also. If you have put on Christ, God seeth you not in yourself but in Christ, and that which belongeth unto Christ belongeth also unto you, for if you be Christ's then are you Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. As the Roman youth when he came of age put on the *toga*, and was admitted to the rights of citizenship, so the putting on of Christ is the token of our admission into the position of sons of God. Thus are we actually admitted to the enjoyment of our glorious heritage. Every blessing of the covenant of grace belongs to those who are Christ's, and every believer is in that list. Thus, then, according to the teaching of the passage, we receive adoption by faith as the gift of grace.

Again, *adoption comes to us by redemption*. Read the passage which precedes the text: "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Beloved, prize redemption, and never listen to teaching which

would destroy its meaning or lower its importance. Remember that ye were not redeemed with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish. You were under the law, and subject to its curse, for you had broken it most grievously, and you were subject to its penalty, for it is written, "the soul that sinneth, it shall die"; and yet again, "cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." You were also under the terror of the law, for you feared its wrath; and you were under its irritating power, for often when the commandment came, sin within you revived and you died. But now you are redeemed from all; as the Holy Ghost saith, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Now ye are not under the law, but under grace, and this because Christ came under the law and kept it both by his active and his passive obedience, fulfilling all its commands and bearing all its penalty on your behalf and in your room and stead. Henceforth you are the redeemed of the Lord, and enjoy a liberty which comes by no other way but that of the eternal ransom. Remember this; and whenever you feel most assured that you are a child of God, praise the redeeming blood; whenever your heart beats highest with love to your great Father, bless the "firstborn among many brethren," who for your sakes came under the law, was circumcised, kept the law in his life, and bowed his head to it in his death, honouring, and magnifying the law, and making the justice and righteousness of God to be more conspicuous by his life than it would have been by the holiness of all mankind, and his justice to be more fully vindicated by his death than it would have been if all the world of sinners had been cast into hell. Glory be to our redeeming Lord, by whom we have received the adoption!

Again, we further learn from the passage that *we now enjoy the privilege of sonship*. According to the run of the passage the apostle means not only that we are children, but that we are full-grown sons. "Because ye are sons," means,—because the time appointed of the Father is come, and you are of age, and no longer under tutors and governors. In our minority we are under the schoolmaster, under the regimen of ceremonies, under types, figures, shadows, learning our A B C by being convinced of sin; but when faith is come we are no longer under the schoolmaster, but come to a more free condition. Till faith comes we are under tutors and governors, like mere boys, but after faith we take our rights as sons of God. The Jewish church of old was under the yoke of the law; its sacrifices were continual and its ceremonies endless; new moons and feasts must be kept; jubilees must be observed and pilgrimages made: in fact, the yoke was too heavy for feeble flesh to bear. The law followed the Israelite into every corner, and dealt with him upon every point: it had to do with his garments, his meat, his drink, his bed, his board, and everything about him: it treated him like a boy at school who has a rule for everything. Now that faith has come we are full grown sons, and therefore we are free from the rules which govern the school of the child. We are under law to Christ, even as the full-grown son is still under the discipline of his father's house; but this is a law of love and not of fear, of grace and not of bondage. "Stand fast

therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Return not to the beggarly elements of a merely outward religion, but keep close to the worship of God in spirit and in truth, for this is the liberty of the children of God.

Now, by faith *we are no more like to bond-servants*. The apostle says that "the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors till the time appointed of the father." But beloved, now are ye the sons of God, and ye have come to your majority: now are ye free to enjoy the honours and blessings of the Father's house. Rejoice that the free spirit dwells within you, and prompts you to holiness; this is a far superior power to the merely external command and the whip of threatening. Now no more are you in bondage to outward forms, and rites, and ceremonies; but the Spirit of God teacheth you all things, and leads you into the inner meaning and substance of the truth.

Now, also, saith the apostle, *we are heirs*—"Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." No man living has ever realised to the full what this means. Believers are at this moment heirs, but what is the estate? It is God himself! We are heirs of God! Not only of the promises, of the covenant engagements, and of all the blessings which belong to the chosen seed, but heirs of God himself. "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul." "This God is our God for ever and ever." We are not only heirs to God, to all that he gives to his firstborn, but heirs of God himself. David said, "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup." As he said to Abraham, "Fear not Abraham, I am thy shield and thine exceeding great reward," so saith he to every man that is born of the Spirit. These are his own words—"I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people." Why, then, O believer, are you poor? All riches are yours. Why then are you sorrowful? The ever-blessed God is yours. Why do you tremble? Omnipotence waits to help you. Why do you distrust? His immutability will abide with you even to the end, and make his promise steadfast. All things are yours, for Christ is yours, and Christ is God's; and though there be some things which at present you cannot actually grasp in your hand, nor even see with your eye, to wit, the things which are laid up for you in heaven, yet still by faith you can enjoy even these, for "he hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ," "in whom also we have obtained an inheritance," so that "our citizenship is in heaven." We enjoy even now the pledge and earnest of heaven in the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. Oh what privileges belong to those who are the sons of God!

Once more upon this point of the believer's dignity, *we are already tasting one of the inevitable consequences of being the sons of God*. What are they? One of them is the opposition of the children of the bondwoman. No sooner had the apostle Paul preached the liberty of the saints, than straightway there arose certain teachers who said, "This will never do; you must be circumcised, you must come under the law." Their opposition was to Paul a token that he was of the free woman, for behold the children of the bondwoman singled him out for their virulent opposition. You shall find, dear brother, that if you enjoy

fellowship with God, if you live in the spirit of adoption, if you are brought near to the Most High, so as to be a member of the divine family, straightway all those who are under bondage to the law will quarrel with you. Thus saith the apostle, "As then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now." The child of Hagar was found by Sarah mocking Isaac, the child of promise. Ishmael would have been glad to have shown his enmity to the hated heir by blows and personal assault, but there was a superior power to check him, so that he could get no further than "mocking." So it is just now. There have been periods in which the enemies of the gospel have gone a great deal further than mocking, for they have been able to imprison and burn alive the lovers of the gospel; but now, thank God, we are under his special protection as to life and limb and liberty, and are as safe as Isaac was in Abraham's house. They can mock us, but they cannot go any further, or else some of us would be publicly gibbeted. But trials of cruel mockings are still to be endured, our words are twisted, our sentiments are misrepresented, and all sorts of horrible things are imputed to us, things which we know not, to all which we would reply with Paul, "Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" This is the old way of the Hagarenes, the child after the flesh is still doing his best to mock him that is born after the Spirit. Do not be astonished, neither be grieved in the least degree when this happens to any of you, but let this also turn to the establishment of your confidence and to the confirmation of your faith in Christ Jesus, for he told you of old, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

II. Our second head is THE CONSEQUENT INDWELLING OF THE HOLY GHOST IN BELIEVERS;—"God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts." *Here is a divine act of the Father.* The Holy Ghost proceedeth from the Father and the Son: and God hath sent him forth into your hearts. If he had only come knocking at your hearts and asked your leave to enter, he had never entered, but when Jehovah sent him he made his way, without violating your will, but yet with irresistible power. Where Jehovah sent him there he will abide, and go no more out for ever. Beloved, I have no time to dwell upon the words, but I want you to turn them over in your thoughts, for they contain a great depth. As surely as God sent his Son into the world to dwell among men, so that his saints beheld his glory, the "glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth," so surely hath God sent forth the Spirit to enter into men's hearts, there to take up his residence that in him also the glory of God may be revealed. Bless and adore the Lord who hath sent you such a visitor as this.

Now, note the style and title under which the Holy Spirit comes to us: *he comes as the Spirit of Jesus.* The words are "the Spirit of his Son," by which is not meant the character and disposition of Christ, though that were quite true, for God sends this unto his people, but it means the Holy Ghost. Why, then, is he called the Spirit of his Son, or the Spirit of Jesus? May we not give these reasons? It was by the Holy Ghost that the human nature of Christ was born of the Virgin. By the Spirit our Lord was attested at his baptism, when the Holy Spirit descended

upon him like a dove, and abode upon him. In him the Holy Spirit dwelt without measure, anointing him for his great work, and by the Spirit he was anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows. The Spirit was also with him, attesting his ministry by signs and wonders. The Holy Ghost is our Lord's great gift to the church; it was after his ascension that he bestowed the gifts of Pentecost, and the Holy Spirit descended upon the church to abide with the people of God for ever. The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of Christ, because, also, he is Christ's witness here below; for "there are three that bear witness on earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood." For these and many other reasons he is called "the Spirit of his Son," and it is he who comes to dwell in believers. I would urge you very solemnly and gratefully to consider the wondrous condescension which is here displayed. God himself the Holy Ghost, takes up his residence in believers. I never know which is the more wonderful, the incarnation of Christ or the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. Jesus dwelt here for awhile in human flesh untainted by sin, holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners; but the Holy Ghost dwells continually in the hearts of all believers, though as yet they are imperfect and prone to evil. Year after year, century after century, he still abideth in the saints, and will do so till the elect are all in glory. While we adore the incarnate Son, let us adore also the indwelling Spirit whom the Father hath sent.

Now notice *the place wherein he takes up his residence*.—"God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son *into your hearts*." Note, that it does not say into your heads or your brains. The Spirit of God doubtless illuminates the intellect and guides the judgment, but this is not the commencement nor the main part of his work. He comes chiefly to the affections, he dwells with the heart, for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and "God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son *into your hearts*." Now, the heart is the centre of our being, and therefore doth the Holy Ghost occupy this place of vantage. He comes into the central fortress and universal citadel of our nature, and thus takes possession of the whole. The heart is the vital part; we speak of it as the chief residence of life, and therefore the Holy Ghost enters it, and as the living God dwells in the living heart, taking possession of the very core and marrow of our being. It is from the heart and through the heart that life is diffused. The blood is sent even to the extremities of the body by the pulsings of the heart, and when the Spirit of God takes possession of the affections, he operates upon every power, and faculty, and member of our entire manhood. Out of the heart are the issues of life, and from the affections sanctified by the Holy Ghost all other faculties and powers receive renewal, illumination, sanctification, strengthening, and ultimate perfection.

This wonderful blessing is ours "because we are sons;" and *it is fraught with marvellous results*. Sonship sealed by the indwelling Spirit brings us peace and joy; it leads to nearness to God and fellowship with him; it excites trust, love, and vehement desire, and creates in us reverence, obedience, and actual likeness to God. All this, and much more, because the Holy Ghost has come to dwell in us. Oh, matchless mystery! Had it not been revealed it had never been imagined, and now that it is revealed it would never have been believed if it had not become

matter of actual experience to those who are in Christ Jesus. There are many professors who know nothing of this; they listen to us with bewilderment as if we told them an idle tale, for the carnal mind knoweth not the things that be of God; they are spiritual, and can only be spiritually discerned. Those who are not sons, or who only come in as sons under the law of nature, like Ishmael, know nothing of this indwelling Spirit, and are up in arms at us for daring to claim so great a blessing: yet it is ours, and none can deprive us of it.

III. Now I come to the third portion of our text—THE FILIAL CRY. This is deeply interesting. I think it will be profitable if your minds enter into it. Where the Holy Ghost enters there is a cry. "God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son, crying, 'Abba, Father.'" Now, notice, *it is the Spirit of God that cries*—a most remarkable fact. Some are inclined to view the expression as a Hebraism, and read it, he "makes us to cry;" but, beloved, the text saith not so, and we are not at liberty to alter it upon such a pretence. We are always right in keeping to what God says, and here we plainly read of the Spirit in our hearts that he is crying "Abba, Father." The apostle in Romans viii. 15 says, "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby *we* cry, Abba, Father," but here he describes the Spirit himself as crying "Abba, Father." We are certain that when he ascribed the cry of "Abba, Father" to us, he did not wish to exclude the Spirit's cry, because in the twenty-sixth verse of the famous eighth of Romans he says, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." Thus he represents the Spirit himself as groaning with unutterable groanings within the child of God, so that when he wrote to the Romans he had on his mind the same thought which he here expressed to the Galatians,—that it is the Spirit itself which cries and groans in us "Abba, Father." How is this? Is it not ourselves that cry? Yes, assuredly; and yet the Spirit cries also. The expressions are both correct. The Holy Spirit prompts and inspires the cry. He puts the cry into the heart and mouth of the believer. It is his cry because he suggests it, approves of it, and educates us to it. We should never have cried thus if he had not first taught us the way. As a mother teaches her child to speak, so he puts this cry of "Abba, Father" into our mouths; yea, it is he who forms in our hearts the desire after our Father, God, and keeps it there. He is the Spirit of adoption, and the author of adoption's special and significant cry.

Not only does he prompt us to cry but he works in us a sense of need which compels us to cry, and also that spirit of confidence which emboldens us to claim such relationship to the great God. Nor is this all, for he assists us in some mysterious manner so that we are able to pray aright; he puts his divine energy into us so that we cry "Abba, Father" in an acceptable manner. There are times when *we* cannot cry at all, and then he cries in us. There are seasons when doubts and fears abound, and so suffocate us with their fumes that we cannot even raise a cry, and then the indwelling Spirit represents us, and speaks for us, and makes intercession for us, crying in our name, and making intercession for us according to the will of God. Thus does the cry "Abba,

Father" rise up in our hearts even when we feel as if we could not pray, and dare not think ourselves children. Then we may each say, "I live, yet not I, but the Spirit that dwelleth in me." On the other hand, at times our soul gives such a sweet assent to the Spirit's cry that it becometh ours also, but then we more than ever own the work of the Spirit, and still ascribe to him the blessed cry, "Abba, Father."

I want you now to notice a very sweet fact about this cry; namely, that *it is literally the cry of the Son*. God hath sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, and that Spirit cries in us exactly according to the cry of the Son. If you turn to the gospel of Mark, at the fourteenth chapter, thirty-sixth verse, you will find there what you will not discover in any other evangelist (for Mark is always the man for the striking points, and the memorable words), he records that our Lord prayed in the garden, "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt." So that this cry in us copies the cry of our Lord to the letter—"Abba, Father." Now, I dare say you have heard these words "Abba, Father" explained at considerable length at other times, and if so, you know that the first word is Syrian or Aramaic; or, roughly speaking, Abba is the Hebrew word for "father." The second word is in Greek, and is the Gentile word, "πατήρ," or *patēr*, which also signifies father. It is said that these two words are used to remind us that Jews and Gentiles are one before God. They do remind us of this, but this cannot have been the principal reason for their use. Do you think that when our Lord was in his agony in the garden that he said, "Abba, Father" because Jews and Gentiles are one? Why should he have thought of that doctrine, and why need he mention it in prayer to his Father? Some other reason must have suggested it to him. It seems to me that our Lord said "Abba" because it was his native tongue. When a Frenchman prays, if he has learned English he may ordinarily pray in English, but if ever he falls into an agony he will pray in French, as surely as he prays at all. Our Welsh brethren tell us that there is no language like Welsh—I suppose it is so *to them*: now they will talk English when about their ordinary business, and they can pray in English when everything goes comfortably with them, but I am sure that if a Welshman is in a great fervency of prayer, he flies to his Welsh tongue to find full expression. Our Lord in his agony used his native language, and as born of the seed of Abraham he cries in his own tongue, "Abba." Even thus, my brethren, we are prompted by the spirit of adoption to use our own language, the language of the heart, and to speak to the Lord freely in our own tongue. Besides, to my mind, the word "Abba" is of all words in all languages the most natural word for father. I must try and pronounce it so that you see the natural childishness of it, "Ab—ba," "Ab—ba." Is it not just what your children say, ab, ab, ba, ba, as soon as they try to talk? It is the sort of word which any child would say, whether Hebrew, or Greek, or French, or English. Therefore, Abba is a word worthy of introduction into all languages. It is truly a child's word, and our Master felt, I have no doubt, in his agony, a love for child's words. Dr. Guthrie, when he was dying, said, "Sing a hymn," but he added, "*Sing me one of the bairns' hymns.*" When a man comes to die he wants to be a child again, and longs for bairns' hymns and bairns' words.

Our blessed Master in his agony used the bairns' word, "Abba," and it is equally becoming in the mouth of each one of us. I think this sweet word "Abba" was chosen to show us that we are to be very natural with God, and not stilted and formal. We are to be very affectionate, and come close to him, and not merely say "Pater," which is a cold Greek word, but say "Abba," which is a warm, natural, loving word, fit for one who is a little child with God, and makes bold to lie in his bosom, and look up into his face and talk with holy boldness. "Abba" is not a word, somehow, but a babe's lisping. Oh, how near we are to God when we can use such a speech! How dear he is to us and dear we are to him when we may thus address him, saying, like the great Son himself, "Abba, Father."

This leads me to observe that *this cry in our hearts is exceedingly near and familiar*. In the sound of it I have shown you that it is childlike, but the tone and manner of the utterance are equally so. Note that it is *a cry*. If we obtain audience with a king we do not cry, we speak then in measured tones and set phrases; but the Spirit of God breaks down our measured tones, and takes away the formality which some hold in great admiration, and he leads us to *cry*, which is the very reverse of formality and stiffness. When we cry, we cry, "Abba": even our very cries are full of the spirit of adoption. A cry is a sound which we are not anxious that every passer-by should hear; yet what child minds his father hearing him cry? So when our heart is broken and subdued we do not feel as if we could talk fine language at all, but the Spirit in us sends forth cries and groans, and of these we are not ashamed, nor are we afraid to cry before God. I know some of you think that God will not hear your prayers, because you cannot pray grandly like such-and-such a minister. Oh, but the Spirit of his Son cries, and you cannot do better than cry too. Be satisfied to offer to God broken language, words salted with your griefs, wetted with your tears. Go to him with holy familiarity, and be not afraid to cry in his presence, "Abba, Father."

But then *how earnest it is*: for a cry is an intense thing. The word implies fervency. A cry is not a flippant utterance, nor a mere thing of the lips, it comes up from the soul. Hath not the Lord taught us to cry to him in prayer with fervent importunity that will not take a denial? Hath he not brought us so near to him that sometimes we say, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me"? Hath he not taught us so to pray that his disciples might almost say of us as they did of one of old, "Send her away, for she crieth after us." We do cry after him, our heart and our flesh crieth out for God, for the living God, and this is the cry, "Abba, Father, I must know thee, I must taste thy love, I must dwell under thy wing, I must behold thy face, I must feel thy great fatherly heart overflowing and filling my heart with peace." We cry, "Abba, Father."

I shall close when I notice this, that *the most of this crying is kept within the heart*, and does not come out at the lips. Like Moses, we cry when we say not a word. God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son *into our hearts*, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father." You know what I mean: it is not alone in your little room, by the old arm-chair, that you cry to God, but you call him "Abba, Father," as you go about the streets or

work in the shop. The Spirit of his Son is crying, "Abba, Father," when you are in the crowd or at your table among the family. I see it is alleged as a very grave charge against me that I speak as if I were familiar with God. If it be so, I make bold to say that I speak only as I feel. Blessed be my heavenly Father's name, I know I am his child, and with whom should a child be familiar but with his father? O ye strangers to the living God, be it known unto you that if this be vile, I purpose to be viler still, as he shall help me to walk more closely with him. We feel a deep reverence for our Father in heaven, which bows us to the very dust, but for all that we can say, "truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." No stranger can understand the nearness of the believer's soul to God in Christ Jesus, and because the world cannot understand it, it finds it convenient to sneer, but what of that? Abraham's tenderness to Isaac made Ishmael jealous, and caused him to laugh, but Isaac had no cause to be ashamed of being ridiculed, since the mocker could not rob him of the covenant blessing. Yes, beloved, the Spirit of God makes you cry "Abba, Father," but the cry is mainly within your heart, and there it is so commonly uttered that it becomes the habit of your soul to be crying to your heavenly Father. The text does not say that he had cried, but the expression is "*crying*"—it is a present participle, indicating that he cries every day "Abba, Father." Go home, my brethren, and live in the spirit of sonship. Wake up in the morning, and let your first thought be "My Father, my Father, be with me this day." Go out into business, and when things perplex you let that be your resort—"My Father, help me in this hour of need." When you go to your home, and there meet with domestic anxieties, let your cry still be, "Help me, my Father." When alone you are not alone, because the Father is with you: and in the midst of the crowd you are not in danger, because the Father himself loveth you. What a blessed word is that,—"*The Father himself loveth you*"! Go, and live as his children. Take heed that ye reverence him, for if he be a father where is his fear? Go and obey him, for this is right. Be ye imitators of God as dear children. Honour him wherever you are, by adorning his doctrine in all things. Go and live upon him, for you shall soon live with him. Go and rejoice in him. Go and cast all your cares upon him. Go henceforth, and whatever men may see in you may they be compelled to own that you are the children of the Highest. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." May you be such henceforth and evermore. Amen and amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Galatians iii.

22—29; iv.; v. 1—6.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—728, 468, 221.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

WHAT THE CHURCH SHOULD BE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 29TH, 1878, BY
C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

"That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."—1 Timothy iii. 15.

PAUL'S design in this epistle was to instruct young Timothy how he should behave himself in the church of God, so as to discharge his office as minister, evangelist, and pastor with honour to himself and profit to the people. He reminds him that the church is the house of God, and in God's own house a man ought to be upon his best behaviour, for it is no light thing to draw nigh unto the Lord. A poor man who is called to visit a prince or king will anxiously enquire how he ought to act. We, poor creatures that we are, when we are admitted into the church which is the house of God, should enquire what conduct will be decorous and comely in those who are admitted into the presence of the great King, and permitted to dwell within his palace gate. Especially should each of us endeavour to behave himself aright in the house of God if we know that we are looked up to and imitated. All who teach the young, all who are parents, all who are persons of age and experience, all who occupy influential positions, and especially all deacons, elders, and preachers, should pray the Lord that they may know how they may behave themselves in the house of God, lest inadvertently their misbehaviour should be injurious to the weaker sort. Such need to learn how they should behave to their brethren, to the Elder Brother, and to the great Father of all. We need to learn the ways of the house, the customs of the palace. Part of the object of the sermon this morning will be that those of us who are in the house of God may learn how we should behave in it: but special prominence will be given to steadfastness in the faith which makes a man not only a dweller in the church but a pillar of it.

I am not going to trouble you this morning with the various interpretations which have been given to the passage before us. It has been a sort of Plain of Eadraelon, where battles have been fought from time

immemorial. Many suggestions have been made as to its interpretation, so as to avoid the sense given in our version, because that sense has been perverted into a defence of the Romish church. It seems to me, however, looking at it as carefully as I am able to do, that our translation is about the best possible one, and I feel sure that it has in it the mind of God. Probably the sense would never have been disputed if it had not been for the controversies which have arisen in which this verse has been misused and misrepresented. I am rather suspicious of interpretations which arise out of controversies. What have we to do with giving either a Protestant or a Catholic sense to Scripture? Is it not our duty to give the true sense, be it what it may? There can never be any justification for twisting Scripture, in order to wrench it out of an enemy's hand. Nor is there any need in this case, even if it were allowable. In vain has the Romish church tried to gather from this verse that she is the great source of truth, for the passage can never apply to her, since she has utterly gone aside from the truth, and is described by the apostle in the verses which follow the text as departing from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, forbidding to marry, and so forth. Popery or no popery, let us take the word of God in its natural and evident meaning, and we shall be instructed thereby. May God the Holy Ghost enable us to understand his own word.

First, I shall at some length *expound* the text, and then try to *enforce* the lesson from it.

In expounding it I see three things to note: and the first is **THE GLORIOUS NAME OF THE CHURCH**—"The church of the living God."

First, it is called *the church*. What is a church? It is an assembly; and a Christian church is an assembly of faithful men: of men who know the truth, believe it, avow it, and adhere to it. The Greek word signifies an assembly summoned out of the whole population to exercise the right of citizenship. An ecclesia, or church, is not a mob, nor a disorderly gathering rushing together without end or purpose, but a regular assembly of persons called out by grace, and gathered together by the Holy Spirit. Those persons make up the assembly of the living God. In order to a church there must be a selection and a calling out; and that calling must come from God, who alone can call effectually. Touching all the members of this select assembly there is an eternal purpose which is the original reason of their being called, and to each of them there is an effectual calling whereby they actually gather into the church; then, also, there is a hedging and fencing about of this church, by which it is maintained as a separate body, distinct from all the rest of mankind. The command which calls them away from the world is very clear—"Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." The church is not a number of unregenerate people coming together entirely of their own notion to defend such and such dogmas. Such persons may form a club, but they cannot make a church. There must be a coming together of renewed men, in the name of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and these must meet for purposes which God himself ordains, and be joined together after his own fashion. Jesus must be the uniting corner stone, and his Spirit the indwelling power, as

it is written, "In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

But the title grows upon us when we read it as "*the church of God.*" There is a synagogue of Satan, and there is a church of God. There are churches so-called which are not of God, though they take upon themselves his name; but what an honour it is to be one of the assembly of God, to be one of those whom God has chosen, whom God has called, whom God has quickened, whom God has sanctified, whom God loves and calls his own! How honoured is that assembly in which he resides! The text speaks not of the church of a country, or of a city, nor of the church of king or prelate, but of the church of God. Blessed be God, since Jesus Christ ascended up on high there has never ceased to be a church of God in the earth, generally hidden and concealed, often persecuted and always despised, yet living still. This church, like its Lord, has been oftener found among the poor than among the rich, more frequently confessing at the stake than honoured in the palace; still has she been present bearing witness for the truth even in the darkest times. There has been left to us a remnant, according to the election of grace, in every age: I speak not now of this denomination nor of that, but of the truly spiritual people who have witnessed faithfully in the life and power of God to the truth as it is in Jesus. This is the church of God.

The title is enhanced in its excellency by the word which is applied to God. It is "*The church of the living God,*"—not thy congregation, O Diana, though they said of thee that thou didst fall from heaven, for thou art a lifeless image! What was Diana of the Ephesians? What life or power was in that senseless block? Timothy knew that the assembly which gathered in the name of Diana was not called out by a living god. Brethren, it is a glorious fact that our God, the God of the church, liveth and reigneth, and that he shows his life all around us. We see him sustaining nature, ruling providence, and reigning in the midst of his church; and while we see him we adore him. Jehovah is the living God, and the divine life is seen in each of the adorable persons of the Godhead. Our Lord Jesus Christ is not to us a dead Christ: we love and bless him because he once died upon the cross, but we adore him because he ever liveth to make intercession for us. We are bold to preach the gospel because of his living power, and we are earnest to observe his commands because we own his living government in the midst of the church. The living God proves his life among us by the Holy Spirit, by the conversion of sinners, by comforting and instructing saints, and by edifying the faithful into a building fitly framed together. Since, then, the church belongs to the living God, what is a dead church? Is that the church of the living God? How can it be? Only as you and I possess the Spirit of God quickening us to a life of godliness may we dare to think ourselves a part of the church of the living God. If you have never been quickened by the Spirit of God, if you are dead in trespasses and sins, what have you to do with the church of the living God? O ye dead and corrupt, how can ye have communion with the living in Zion. Only when you live unto God may you be built up as living stones into the living temple of the living God. The thing most to be dreaded in any one church is the decay of life. We may soon fall into formalism, and even hold the truth in the cold grip of

spiritual death; prayer may be neglected, and the other offices of spiritual life may be disregarded, and then all will languish. "Thou hast the name that thou livest and art dead" is the dreadful sentence which must be written across the brow of a merely nominal church. Brethren, if we would be the church of the living God, we must be thoroughly alive unto God.

What an august body is this church of the living God. Where do I see it? I say not that I see the whole of it, for as yet this bride of Christ is in the making. As Adam saw not Eve until she was perfected, and therefore we cannot suppose that she saw herself, so we see no visible embodiment of the entire church of Christ nor shall we see it until Christ shall come a second time, and shall present her unto himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. To-day we must walk very much by faith as to the church of Christ, for her members are yet being fashioned, and are best discerned by spiritual men. Happy are we if we are members of that church, yea, members of Christ himself by the living faith which unites us to the living God. Never let us speak disrespectfully of the church of God, nor think of her with other than love and with intense devotion to her interests, for she belongs to God. Let us pray for her peace and prosperity, since she is the city of the great King. Let us ask the Lord daily to make his own church more and more visible and powerful in the midst of mankind, that she may come forth "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

Now, secondly we will consider, HER DESIGN IN REFERENCE TO GOD. The Apostle speaks of the church of the living God as *the house of God*. This is a very beautiful and instructive figure. "The Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands," whether they are called cathedrals, churches, or meeting houses. To-day there is no consecrated shrine, no appointed building where we must resort if we would meet with God, for behold the Lord is to be found everywhere by those who worship him in spirit and in truth. True hearts view the entire universe as a temple wherein everyone speaks of the glory of God. Yet there is a shrine and a temple, but it is living and spiritual: the called out assembly, the church of the living God is the special abode of Deity.

I suppose we are to understand first by the church being God's house, that it is *the place of his worship*. As of old the temple was the holy place to which the children of Israel went up in pilgrimage, the point towards which they opened their windows when they prayed, and the place of the one altar and the one sacrifice; so now the church of God is the sole place of God's true worship. He is spiritually worshipped nowhere else. They who were never called, and never quickened by him may pretend to worship him, but what is dead worship to the living God? They may profess to serve him with gorgeous ceremonies, smoking incense, and harmonious music; but what is this to him who is a spirit and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth? It is only where men are spiritual that there can be spiritual worship; it is only with their love, and with their trust and with their joy in the name of Jesus, and with their prayers and praises, presented by the power of the Holy Ghost, that God is to be worshipped at all. Do not dream, ye ungodly, that ye can

worship the living God. The first essential to your acceptance is that ye accept his salvation. Be ye first reconciled to him by the death of his Son: for how shall his enemies present to him acceptable praises? Ye must become a part of the living church by being born again, or else ye cannot worship the Lord at all.

But I like better still to get away from the somewhat ceremonious idea of a temple to the more familiar thought of a house or home. The Lord makes the church *the place of his indwelling*. The thought itself is charming. It is that old prophecy fulfilled, "I will dwell in them and walk in them." God calls his church a house in the sense of his residing there. He is everywhere; but his special resort, the place of his feet, the home of his heart, is his called-out congregation, his elect, redeemed, regenerated, sanctified church. Does not this invest believers with a wondrous dignity, that God should dwell in them? "Know ye not that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost?" God dwelleth in you. If you are indeed quickened of the Spirit, the Spirit abideth in you, and shall be with you for ever. Of the church we read, "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved."

In his own house a man not only dwells, for he might do that in any inn; but there he feels himself to be at home, and therefore it is *the place of his manifestation*. You do not see the man on the bench, for there you see the judge; nor on business, for there you see the trader; but at home, with the children, as one of them, you see the man, the father, the husband; you see his heart and soul. And God is not seen in all the universe with anything like the degree of clearness that he is beheld in the midst of his people. The Lord God is more gloriously manifested in his people than in all the works of creation. First, in the person of his Son he has revealed himself right gloriously, and then in all those who are united to his Son. He manifests himself to us as he doth not unto the world. Oh, what unbendings of divine majesty have we seen! What unveilings of the incomprehensible, what revelations of the infinite has the Lord caused to pass before his church! "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet unto my taste." "He brought me into the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love." It is in the midst of his church that we see our Lord and are glad.

A man's house is, also, *the place of his paternal rule*. In the church we are under the present rule of our heavenly Father. In the church of God you will sometimes see this very remarkably. I believe that when Paul said concerning certain offences in the church, "For this cause some are sickly among you and many sleep," he gave us a hint of the remarkable discipline which the great Head of the house exerts over church members. I do not say over members of all churches, but I say that among members of pure churches there is a solemn discipline going on, for the Lord is jealous over his house, and he will be sanctified in them that come nigh unto him, therefore "be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." If he be a father he expects that his word should rule his household. In the blessed household of God our Father, our Lord is the sole ruler. In God's house we know no law but God's law; and we own no legislator but Jesus, who said, "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." Blessed is that rule, and blessed

are they who submit to it, doing his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word. God grant us grace to stand up for the crown rights of King Jesus, and the paternal authority of God in his own church; and never may we brook any merely human authority in the church, however long the usurpation may have continued. If any come among us and speak not according to his word, let us judge that they have no light in them, but let us give no place for subjection to them—no, not for an hour.

Once again, it is for his own house that a man works and spends his strength; it is *the object of his choicest purposes*. If a man shall compass sea and land to gain gold, it is for his house. If he rise up early and sit up late and eat the bread of carefulness, it is still for his house. And so the great Householder ruleth all things for his chosen family, and the end and the design of all providence, if we were to trace it to its ultimate object, is the good of them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose. The Lord's people are his portion and his inheritance. Dwelling in them, he regards them as his palace; he looks upon the church as the eye of the universe, the joy of the earth, the crown of all his works. Towards her his thoughts of love go forth, and for her are his words of truth and acts of power.

We will not leave this point without observing *how holy*, then, should all members of Christian churches be! "Holiness becometh thine house." An unholy member of a church! What shall I say? Let that black stone be wet with tears of penitence this day, and then may it be washed in the blood of Jesus. O member of the church, is thy conduct inconsistent with thy profession? Judge thyself, and be zealous and repent. All of us may well humble ourselves in the sight of God and ask him to cleanse us that we may be fit for him to dwell in.

How obedient also should we be; for if we are a part of the house of God, let it be our joy to submit ourselves to the Master. When we were children in the home of a loving father, his rule was not irksome to us, and with such a Father as our God we own that his commandments are not grievous. Let us obey carefully and joyfully, each one of us.

How struck with awe ought every church-member to be to think that he is built into God's house. Truly, as I enter among the people of God, I feel bound to cry with Jacob, "How dreadful is this place! It is none other than the house of God." Take not lightly upon yourselves a profession of Christianity, and when ye have been baptized into the name of Christ, and are united with his church, see that ye walk circumspectly, and that ye adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things.

At the same time, *how full of love* ought we to be, for God is love. A house is no home if love be absent, and a church is unchurchly if there be division among the brethren. Is it not written, "The Father himself loveth you," "Little children, love one another," "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him"?

Thus have we spoken upon the design of the church in reference to God:—The tug of war comes in the third place, **THE DESIGN OF THE CHURCH IN REFERENCE TO THE TRUTH**. Paul compares it to a pillar and its pedestal or basement; for that, I think, would be a fair translation. The temple of Diana, at Ephesus, was adorned with more than a hundred columns of stupendous size. They were mostly of Parian

marble, and were either furnished by the various cities of Asia as offerings to the goddess, or were contributed by wealthy men and princes. These pillars are said to have been immense monoliths: single stones of sixty feet in height, and they were set upon a basement which was elevated ten steps above the surrounding area. Diana had her pillar and her basement, but she had no pillar or basement of truth, hers was all imposture throughout. Now, Paul calls the church of God the basement and pillar of the truth. What does he mean? Notice, that she is not the creator of the truth, nor the inventor and fashioner of doctrine. You would think from the talk of certain divines, nowadays, that the church of God must surely be a manufactory of notions, a school of inventions where clever men think out new gospels for new times, or, like spiders, spin out of themselves fresh webs as the old ones are broken. Our admiration is solicited for those who are "abreast of the times," and who keep pace with the wonderful advance of the nineteenth century. Now, the church of God is not the inventor of the truth; she is the pillar and basement of it.

Let it be remembered, also, that the figure must not be pushed beyond what it was meant to teach. In a certain sense the church cannot be the pillar and ground of the truth. Truth is true of itself, and owes its origin to God himself and the nature of things. The church is not here described as the deepest foundation of the truth, for the basement of the pillar of truth rests on a rock, and the church rests on God, the Rock of ages. But truth in itself is one thing, as truth as existing in the world is another thing. You often hear it said at public meetings that truth is mighty and will prevail. I dare say the proverb is true, but if you put a truth away on the shelf, and no man mentions it for ages, it will not prevail. Truth never prevails till some living mind believes it, vindicates it, and proclaims it abroad. The person who thus takes up a grand truth, declares it, fights for it, and makes it known, may be very properly called the pillar and the basis of the cause; for the spread of the principle depends upon him. We may say of the Reformation, Luther was its pillar and basement; or of Methodism the same might be said of Wesley. Note how in another place Paul says that James and Cephas and John seemed to be pillars; that is to say, they were upholders of the good cause. There are men alive at this day of whom we may say, "They are the pillars of the cause," and in the same sense the church of God is the pillar and the basement of the truth among mankind.

Notice that the text speaks of "The church of God," meaning all the people of God, and not the clergy alone. There is a very grave lesson here. We frequently hear it said, "So-and-so is gone into the church." Now, remember that everybody who has gone into Christ Jesus has gone into the church, but no one else. The clergy are not the church: it would be a great pity if they were. In all churches it is a great fault if the whole of the people are not recognised in the work of the Lord, in the affairs of his house, and especially in the maintenance of his truth. As fish are said to stink first at the head, so will you find that the first people to depart from the truth are those who ought to be the very last, namely, the professed teachers of it. If the people could but speak so as to be heard we should not have one half the heresy which now defiles

the house of God. The people are very often put on one side, as if they were not at all to be considered, but were to be managed and catered for by their spiritual lords. Then, alas! these great ones betray the cause, and sell Christ as cheaply as Judas did. They mix up the teaching of the Spirit with the conceit of the flesh, and become so wise that they refuse to know Christ and him crucified. They will not keep to the Scriptures, but dive down into their own thoughts and imaginations, till they stir the mud at the bottom of their subjects, and do not themselves know where they are, nor can any man tell them. Most of the false doctrine in the world has been suggested by those whose very office it is to preach the truth. Hence the truth is not trusted to the ministry, it is based and pillared upon the whole church. The poor old bedridden sister who sings of Jesus' everlasting love is quite as much a defender of the faith as an archbishop, and perhaps more: the unlettered peasant, who knows the doctrines of grace by deep experience, and hence will never let them go, is as true a guardian of the gospel treasure as the most profound scholar; and perhaps far more so. The whole of you who really love God are set for the maintenance of the truth in the world. Under God the Holy Spirit the cause of truth depends upon you; you are its pillar and its basement.

What does the expression mean—the pillar and basement? I think it means, first, that *in the church the truth should abide*. In the church of the living God it always does abide, even as a pillar stirs not from its place. In the confession of the church made by each one of her members, in the teaching of her ministers, and in the witness of the whole body, truth will be found at all times. The church of God is not the quicksand of the truth, but the pillar and pedestal of it: she is not the floating island of the truth, but the eternal column of it. The church stands steadfast and unmoveable as a pillar of truth fixed on its base. If you find not truth anywhere else, you will find it in the church of the living God, which is truth's castle and stronghold. "In which church?" say you. I said in the church of the living God. I did not say in the Church of England, nor in the Church of Scotland, nor in the Wesleyan church, nor in the Baptist church, nor even in the assembly of Exclusive Brethren; but I did say that the truth of God is as a treasure in the church of the living God, and it is never removed from her keeping. Therefore, if the truth is not maintained by any so-called church, it is not the church of God. When truth is given up everything is given up. The very idea of a church involves the retaining of the truth with constant steadfastness, and if this be neglected the so-called church has nothing left it but the name. As a pillar and its base are always in one place, so must the church be a fixed, permanent, and unalterable column of gospel truth, and woo to her if she be not so.

Secondly, it means that *in the true church the truth is uplifted as upon a pillar*. Truth not only rests there as a pedestal, but it stands upright as a pillar. It is the duty and the privilege of the church of God to exalt the truth into the open view of all mankind. Possibly you may have seen the column of Trajan, or the column in the Place Vendôme in Paris; these may serve as illustrations. Around these shafts you see the victories of the conqueror pictured in relief, and lifted into the air, that all may see them. Now, the church of God is a pillar which lifts

up and publishes, far and wide, the achievements of our conquering Lord, saying to all mankind, "God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." I may give an illustration of a pillar being said to speak from our own column commemorating the great fire of London, which is popularly called the Monument. It used to bear an inscription to the effect that the papists burned the city, a charge which no one now believes. The poet Pope said of it—

"Where London's column, pointing to the skies,
Like a tall bully, lifts its head and lies."

Now I shall venture to alter the lines, and say—

"See Christ's own church, still pointing to the sky,
Like a tall champion, lift the truth on high."

Our Lord never taught us to hide the gospel in little rooms down back alleys; he would have us come to the front as much as we can. The church is not a cellar to conceal the truth, but a pillar to display it. "A city set on a hill cannot be hid." What is there to be ashamed of? We may ourselves remain unknown, but we must make the truth known at all costs. The church should be like a lighthouse, which is often built as a tall pillar to bear the light at its summit; and, like a memorial column which bears a statue upon the top of it, she should lift up the truth of God before the gaze of all men.

Again, a church is intended by God *to set forth the truth with beauty*; for in a temple pillars and columns are meant for ornaments as well as for service. The fluted and richly carved pillars of Diana's temple were the admiration of all who saw them, and in after days they were so esteemed that they were carried to other lands to adorn other edifices: the dome of Santa Sophia, in Constantinople, now rises from columns of green jasper originally placed in the temple of Diana. The church should adorn the doctrine of God her Saviour in all things. His truth should be emblazoned upon her like an inscription upon a column, so stately as to secure attention and command respect. A living Christian is the best ornament of Christianity. God's service should be performed in the beauty of holiness.

Once more, it is the church's business *to maintain the truth* with all her might. She is set as a brazen wall and an iron pillar against all error. However men may cringe or bow, there stands the column fast and firm, fixed on its pedestal, set on its base. So should the church in all ages stand fast to truth, and yield to no error, nor concealment of doctrine, nor change of ordinance. The church of the apostles is the model of the church of to-day. The pattern of the Church of Christ is not to be found in the popish synagogues of the middle ages, but in the first age when Jesus Christ spake and said, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." The business of the church is to uphold, defend, maintain, and propagate the pure doctrine of Christ and his apostles, and if she fails in this, if in her midst the truth is not prized, if it is not adorned,

if it is not vindicated and proclaimed, the church, so-called, is no longer the pillar of the truth, but a bowing wall and a tottering fence.

Now, I must occupy your time a little longer while I try to *enforce a truth* which lies very near my own heart, and I pray God it may lie near the hearts of all his people at this perilous hour. The truths which may be derived from the text are of one order. The first is that *the whole church is to maintain the truth*. Dear brethren and sisters, be very zealous for the gospel, the old, old gospel of the grace of God; the doctrine of justification by faith and forgiveness by the atonement. I speak to you who know the truth, for you alone make up the church of God. Do not, I beseech you, allow in yourselves an ignorance of God's word, but study it and seek to know more and more of it. But what you do know by the teachings of God's Spirit bind about yourselves as a girdle never to be loosed. There are seducing spirits abroad that would deceive, if it were possible, the very elect; therefore, I entreat you be not beguiled by their exceeding craftiness. Turn not aside from your steadfastness, but abide in the faith. They will tell you that you are bigoted. Never mind them, for in their mouths bigotry is another name for decision of character. The gospel of salvation is the hope of men, therefore do all you can to make it known. Do not cast in your lot with those who are given to change; but stand in the old paths. It may happen that the wealthier people of the town are in error, and it may be for your temporal advantage to join their community; but make no confederacy with false doctrine. Better go to the meanest conventicle and help to maintain the truth than attend the wealthiest congregation where the gospel is thrown into the background. I charge you by the living God in these evil days to keep yourselves pure from error. A true church is appointed of God for the conservation of the truth; and before the Lord, at the foot of the cross, in the power of the eternal Spirit, we would pray that even unto death we may be faithful to our charge.

Next remember that *a church is unchurched which is not faithful to the truth*. The church of Rome, when she forbade to marry, and commanded to abstain from meats, set up also the mass in the place of the sacrifice of Christ, and her priests in the room of the one Great High Priest. Then she taught and encouraged idolatry in the worship of images, relics, and the like; and by all this she unchurched herself, and is now described in Scripture, not as the bride of Christ, but as the harlot of Babylon. She is not the pillar of the truth, but the grave of it. She was moved by error; she fell from her uprightness; she lies prone in utter ruin, never to be restored. Alas, any church may thus perish. The apostasy of Rome should be a warning to all other churches, lest they also by little and little become defiled, and cease to answer to the divine design, and are cast away for ever.

Next, recollect that *any church fails in her design as being the pillar and pedestal of the truth in proportion as she departs from the truth*. I therefore do with all my soul deprecate what I see around me everywhere of disregard to the truth. It is not merely that men change their views, but that they are becoming indifferent to truth altogether, and seem to think they do God service when they unsettle the youthful mind. First, we deplore all *tampering with inspiration*. The sacred volume is

scarcely admitted to be inspired at all, or at best it is said to be inspired in some such moderated sense as Milton or Shakespeare may have been inspired. Then *this* book is torn away from Scripture, and then the other; and some who ought to know better say, "That portion of the Bible is written for the Jews, and not for us"; and so by degrees all the precious volume is rent from us. Could the saints in heaven, who used to feed on the word of God, return to this lower world, they would be surprised to find that our wise men have questioned almost every prophet and evangelist, psalm and epistle: every portion of the word is challenged, and the whole of Scripture is assailed, *and that by men who continue in what professes to be a church*. We still hold that the Bible, and the Bible alone, is the religion of the Christian, and we intend to hold to it all the more because others fall from their steadfastness.

Alas, *the grand old doctrines of the gospel are also despoiled!* Do you notice, nowadays, how all the great truths are being spirited away? Men use the words, but they mock the ear, for they reject the sense: they hand us nuts; we crack them and we find that the worm of modern thought has eaten out the kernel. The doctrine of the atonement has in some cases been the chief object of assault. Take that away, and what is left? For what purpose is there a Church at all, if the atonement of Jesus Christ is not to be proclaimed by it? Let her die; why should she live if she has no testimony to bear! If she has no divine infallible message of pardon for the guilty and rest for the weary, let her perish. Listen to the detestable talk of modern ecclesiastics, and you will hear them say, "Brethren, your own thoughts are your best guide, the enlightened consciousness of this age will best instruct you; the Bible is our sacred book, but cut out whatever you like, alter whatever you please. We will yield anything sooner than be in opposition to the philosophers. Our illiterate predecessors, the fishermen, together with Paul and others, were raw hands at teaching, and very unwisely thrust themselves into conflict with the best thought and culture of the period, so that their teaching was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; but we know a great deal better, we adapt ourselves to the times, and entertain great sympathy for honest doubt. We also know on which side our bread is buttered, and we are ready to alter and amend to please the fashion of the hour." Where this is the talk there remains no longer a church. It is nothing but the name of a church when the doctrines of God's infallible word are trodden in the dust.

A church ceases to be a church of Christ in proportion also as she *alters the ordinances of God*. These must be practised as they were delivered. When a church rejects the ancient ordinances of Believers' Baptism and the Lord's Supper, her next step is to make new ones. Thus forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from meat are brought in. The first is much vaunted as a means for the production of purity, but how much the priests and monks and nuns have done for purity I leave history to record. Believers' baptism was thrown to the winds, and then baptismal regeneration must needs be brought in. The Lord's Supper was by far too common, and so the unbloody sacrifice of the mass was devised. O church of God, when wilt thou come

back to the law and to the testimony, and follow the mind of Christ, and the doings of his apostles ?

Churches also get wrong when they *neglect discipline*, when they admit into their membership persons who do not even profess to be converted ; and, I add, when, because of pleasing men, they tolerate in their midst ministers whose teaching is corrupt and full of infidelity. There are preachers, nowadays, who are studiously undermining the faith once delivered to the saints. The Church should separate itself both from wicked persons and from false teachers ; she should no more tolerate evil teachers in her pulpits than you would allow a poisoner in your nursery, or a wolf in your sheepfold. God grant that our churches may rise to their duty, however painful it may be. Yea, may they keep close to the faith, for they cannot else be the pillar and ground of the truth. An unholy, unregenerated church can never be the pillar of the truth. If there be a failure in vital godliness, if humble walking with God be neglected, the church cannot long remain a healthy church of God.

Now, brethren, you see how each one of you ought to behave in the church of God. One part of your behaviour is that you abide firm as a pillar. Stand fast ; quit yourselves like men ; be strong. You ought to be pillars, specially you who have known the Lord thirty or forty years ; you should stand fast to the truth, and I pray that you may. May the church in Scotland which of old witnessed to the gospel be kept steadfast. Her Covenanting fathers loved the truth, and shed their blood for it ; may the Lord help their sons to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. May the churches of our own England also be recovered from their declension, and then maintained by the Spirit of God in stern fidelity to the gospel. I cannot finish my sermon better than by commending to you the verse which was sung just now by your five thousand voices.

“ Should all the forms that men devise
Assault my faith with treacherous art,
I'll call them vanity and lies,
And bind the gospel to my heart.”

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 Timothy iii.
14—16 ; iv.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—122, 900, 486.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

OTHERS TO BE GATHERED.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 6TH, 1878, BY

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"The Lord God which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him."—Isaiah lvi. 8.

God's work now is that of *gathering*. There was a time when it was scattering. Man built the tower of Babel, which was intended to be the centre of unity, the armoury of power, and the seat of dominion, whence some mighty Nimrod might sway his sceptre over all the human race: but the Lord would not have it so. Infinite wisdom baffled finite ambition. Man's centre is not God's centre, and therefore he confounded their language, and scattered them into nations, by whom the whole earth has been inhabited. Now the Lord is gathering together in one the children of God which are scattered abroad. His Son Jesus Christ hath descended and dwelt among us, working out our redemption, and now, exalted in the highest heavens, he is God's appointed centre of his people; as Jacob said of old, "Unto him shall the gathering of the people be." The Lord hath made him to "stand for an ensign of the people, to him shall the Gentiles seek, and his rest shall be glorious." The great promise given by the mouth of Isaiah is to be fulfilled under the gospel dispensation,—*"I will gather all nations and tongues, and they shall come and see my glory."* Jesus hath made both Jew and Gentile one, breaking down every wall of partition, so that there is neither barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all and in all. The power and grace of God are continually drawing men from all nations and kindreds and tongues to the common hope, even the atonement made by the death of our Lord Jesus, and to the common service, even to service under the one and only Lord, of whom it is written, *"One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren."* This ingathering process is going on every day by the testimony of the word, and it is to be continued until the end of time. I trust it will be carried on in our midst to-day. May the Lord put the magnet down among us, and draw towards the loadstone of Jesus' love all hearts made ready to

feel its influence. It is my earnest hope that some who have never thought of being gathered to Christ may find themselves drawn towards him to-day. May the mystic current of divine grace carry many of you away with its gentle force, and bear you first to Jesus, who is Israel's Prince, and then to his church, which is the true Israel of God.

I. Under our first head we shall notice a point of considerable encouragement to those who seek the Lord. Note well **THE INSTANCES MENTIONED**: instances of gathering by the hand of the Lord, who is described as "The Lord God which gathereth the outcasts of Israel." Outcasts have been gathered, and this is the token that others shall be gathered.

I suppose Isaiah first alludes to *the banished who had been carried away captive to Babylon* and to all parts of the East, but who were at different times restored to their land. The Israelites had been subject to many captivities. One tyrant after another invaded the country, and carried them far away; but the Lord promised to gather them together, and he did so. The names of Ezra, Nehemiah, and the like, will remind you of the home-coming from distant lands of various contingents of God's host, who marched through the deserts and passed through hostile nations till they reached the city of their God. Very marvellous were these restorations, for kings that knew not God were girded by him to accomplish his designs; even as he said of Cyrus—"I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the Lord of hosts." Now, God who brought his people out of Babylon can bring men out of sin: he who loosed captives from bondage can liberate spirits from despair; he who made the mighty tyrant relax his grasp can cause Satan to loose his hold; and he who led his people by a way that they knew not till they came back to their land can lead the poor seeking sinner through all the devious paths of doubt and fear, and bring him to rest in Jesus Christ. Let Israelites returning from Babylon preach the gospel to us this morning: let them proclaim to us the word of hope: "If we who were carried captive far off from Zion are brought back, so also will the Lord devise means that his banished be not expelled from him."

But I prefer to use the text in reference to our divine Lord and Master, seeing that to him shall the gathering of the people be. When he was here below *he gathered the outcasts of Israel by his ministry*. Look at the group around him, and mark carefully those who press nearest to him. You need not notice those scribes and Pharisees in the outer circle; fain would they entrap him in his speech; let us leave them to themselves, and only notice those who stand so quietly, who listen so eagerly, whose tears flow so freely, and whose hearts are so deeply touched. Who are these? It is written, "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him." His enemies said it in scorn, but we tell it to his honour—"This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." All through his progress in the Holy Land he was seeking "the lost sheep of the house of Israel"; not merely silly, defenceless sheep, but *lost* sheep, wanderers in sin, "for the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." His eye was always readiest to spy out the fallen, and his glance was always kindest for

those who were most erring, for, said he, "The whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." O blessed Master, "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners," the sinners came to thee, and coming to thee, found thee to be Jesus, the sinner's friend.

Moreover, our Lord did not merely gather outcasts to his ministry, but *he gathered them by forgiving their sins*. This brought them nearer still, and held them there. You know who it was that washed his feet with tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head: that woman whose memorial shall never die out of the church, who loved him much, because much had been forgiven her. She was a sinner, a city sinner, a shameful sinner, but she came to him for cleansing and it was granted her. I should not wonder if she had heard him tell about the lost piece of money, and the lost sheep, and the lost son; and perhaps the parable itself, and the way in which Jesus spoke it, touched her heart, and made her hope and long to be sought and found. With her much sin she came to him who had much grace, and her black sins were blotted out by his dear love, and henceforth she, above all women, loved him, for much had been forgiven her. I suppose she was but a specimen of many others who clung to him, because in him they had found what an awakened heart needs above everything else, namely, forgiveness for transgression. At this present moment, in Jesus' name, I would set that woman before you, and say as he did, "Seest thou this woman?" Then learn that like as Jesus received her, so also will he receive you if you come to him, for he hath said it, and he cannot lie, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Come unto him then, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and he will give you rest. Let the one poor outcast, who wept at his feet, set you the fashion, and do you at once imitate her. You know how in the pursuit of game men use decoys that they may attract the birds by one of themselves; and I would this morning use this woman as a decoy; if there be others like her, guilty of the very same sin, let them come to Jesus for pardon as she did. Others should come also who may not be guilty of the same form of evil and yet feel equally condemned in the sight of the Lord. If consciousness of guilt humbles you to that poor woman's level, come and accept her Saviour. Jesus gathers together the outcasts of Israel. Dear hearts, why should he not gather you? Why should not the glance of love which fell on the sinner of old fall also upon you? Why should not you also feel the same love, and exhibit it in acts of penitence and deeds of humility? Jesus is ready to have his feet washed again by such as you.

Nor, indeed, was this all, for *our Lord gathered some, yea many, by graciously helping them*. He met with some whose great trial was sore affliction, temptation, and sorrow. Magdalene is a chief instance; beloved name in the Christian church! Magdalene out of whom he cast seven devils. It was not her fault so much as her grief that seven devils had entered her. She struggled with those demons but they would not leave her; but when Jesus came they fled at his rebuke; and henceforth Mary of Magdala was foremost among the holy women who follow the Blessed One. Now just as our Lord delivered Mary of Magdalene from seven devils, so can he deliver any of you who are sore beset by

temptation. Do the devils within you arise from habit? Such spirits are very powerful, but Jesus is more than a match for them. Habit becomes second nature to a man, but Jesus is greater than either first or second nature. Habits began to bind us as with spiders' webs, but they thicken and harden into meshes of iron: our Lord can with a breath remove the iron net and set the prisoner free. Or are you tempted by constitutional sin, some evil which has entrenched itself within the peculiarities of your being, finding, as it were, a rest within the special texture of your mind and fashion of your body? Jesus can dislodge the subtle foe, and make this body of yours, which has been a cage of unclean birds, to become a temple of the Holy Ghost. Or are your surroundings very unfavourable? Does the devil molest you through the place wherein you dwell, and the people among whom you reside? Jesus can help you there, and make you fair as the curtains of Solomon, even while you dwell in the tents of Kedar. Or is your case of another kind? Are you beset with doubts and infidelities innumerable? Do you question this and question that? Has your mind a sceptical bias? My Master can gather you also, and make you stronger in faith than your brethren, even as Thomas, who doubted, became a firm and adoring believer. Unbelief is a very tormenting spirit, and causes much distress of soul; but the Lord can gather unbelievers and misbelievers, and bring them to the true faith, and to the peace which cometh of it. Since he gathered to himself a woman out of whom he cast seven devils, and a man from whom a whole legion were made to flee, why should he not deliver those of you who are under bondage now?

He gathered them, also, so as to enrol them under his banner. It was a marvellous moment for Levi, when he sat at the receipt of custom, when Jesus called him. He had changed his name, and tried to be a Gentile, calling himself Matthew, and there he sat, careful only for the coin, and Jesus said to him, "Follow me," and he obeyed the voice. He was no longer a gatherer of taxes, but a gatherer of souls: he enlisted beneath the banner of Christ, and no longer engaged in the service of the Roman. Yes, and my Master can gather just such as he. You busy men, who have almost brought your pens behind your ears into the house of God this morning, you who as you take up your hymn-books almost wish you had your day-books and your ledgers with you, he can say to you, "Follow me." He can make you to use the pen of a ready writer in his cause. You shall do business in the most precious commodities, and make many rich. Rising from the receipt of custom, you shall yield yourself to Jesus, and become henceforth his steward. Those gathered by our Lord, when he was here among the sons of men, are specimens to allure your hope, to excite your desires, that you also may be gathered into his church and unto himself.

I will give one other specimen, and then we will leave this point. You will, perhaps, think that my Master's gathering power lay in his being here himself. It is true there was a matchless charm about him, and yet to let us know that we must know him no longer after the flesh, there was not even in the charms of Christ's most blessed person enough of power to prevent the people crying, "Crucify him, crucify him." His power is spiritual, the power of his own Spirit, and therefore it is exercised now, though his bodily presence is removed. It fell on a day when our Lord

had gone home to his Father that his servants were all met together in one place with one accord for his worship, and suddenly the Spirit burst in upon them as a rushing mighty wind, and in cloven tongues of fire it sat on each of them. Then they stood up and preached in his name, and declared that Jesus, who had been crucified, was now the Saviour. On that same day he gathered, for he was there by his Spirit, though not in person; he gathered, I say, unto his church, three thousand souls. Jesus can gather indeed: the people flock unto him. It is still true, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Though he be not here, yet if we preach him, if we tell out his love, if we speak of his death, and of his atoning blood, his name is as ointment poured forth and the virgins will come together to enjoy the perfume. There is no name like his for gathering the people. He will gather others beside those which have been gathered unto him.

II. I now pass on to my second head, which is this, THE PROMISE UTTERED. "The Lord God which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him." It is evident that *this promise is very wide*. It means in the first place that the Gentiles should be called to know the Lord. "Yet will I gather others to him." Not other Jews, but those others whom they called "Gentile dogs." It was a bright day when first of all the centurion of Cæsarea sent men to Joppa and received a visit from Peter and was baptized of him. Fair also was the day when the Ethiopian eunuch was baptized of Philip. Then was the Lord "gathering others unto him." How strange it must have seemed at first to the apostles, who were all Jews, and very strongly Jewish too, especially Peter, to see the Gentiles gathered. One marvels that Paul was not more narrow in heart, considering his birth and education, but he had vanquished his old notions, and gloried in being the apostle of the Gentiles.

It is delightful to my mind to think of men of divers colours coming to Christ, and in the best possible manner proving the unity of our race. What would the twelve have thought if they could have foreseen that the gospel which they preached would bind in one brotherhood all races of men? Jesus has gathered not merely Romans and Greeks and Jews, but the descendants of those barbarous people who lived in the white-cliffed island beyond Gaul which men called Britain. He has gathered those savage people unto him. And now how pleasing to see the Red Indian bowing with the pale-faces at Jesus' name; to see China, once hermetically sealed, now open to the gospel, and Japan inviting our missionaries to instruct her; also to see the dwellers in the South Seas and the black races of Africa stretching out their hands unto God. Strange and uncouth in appearance and in tongue are many of the tribes of mankind, but they shall be gathered as surely as the more civilized. There scarcely remaineth any nation out of which the Lord hath not gathered some to his church; and our faith is that ere long the gospel shall be preached throughout all lands. It has not come yet. We heard the other night of nations which have never yet received a Christian minister. There is Thibet, for instance, lying with its millions without a word of Christ ever having been spoken among them. To millions upon millions of people the name of Jesus is as yet an unknown sound; yet they shall be gathered out of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and

tongues, and shall unite in one great family. The gospel of Jesus is cosmopolitan. It suits so well with our own latitude that one would think that our Lord was born an Englishman: but the same is true in reference to every land. His name was fitly mentioned by the Jordan, but it loses none of its music by the Thames, the Ganges, or the Orinoco. Jesus belongeth to all lands, whether they are scorched by tropical suns or frozen by the long winters of the poles. Jesus is *a man*, and a man is a noble name, nobler than Jew, or Briton, or Roman. He is "*the man*," the man of men, man's man, the man for men. Let all men worship him, for he is the hope of our race, the restorer of our ruin, the gatherer of the new people, and he shall gather others beside those that have been gathered unto him. "God hath made of one blood all nations of men that dwell upon the face of the earth," and that one blood also has at the back of it another blood more precious still, by which one blood he hath redeemed from among men a multitude which no man can number.

Now, let us look at the text and note that *the promise is continuous*: "Yet will I gather others." That was true when Isaiah stated it; it would have been true if Peter had quoted it on the morning of Pentecost. It was quite true when Carey acted upon it, and started on what men thought his mad enterprise, to go as a consecrated cobbler to convert the learned Brahmins of India, and to lay the foundation of Messiah's kingdom there. It was true *then*: it is quite as true *now*. If the promise had been written this morning and the ink were not yet dry it would be no more true than it is now:—"Yet will I gather others to him."

It will be true, whoever stands in this pulpit, when we are dead and gone; and until the earth shall have completed the cycle of longsuffering, and the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout it shall still be true,—“Yet will I gather others to him.” “Other sheep have I,” said Christ, “that are not yet of this fold, them also I must bring in.” There are many yet unsaved, unregenerate, uncalled, who must be brought to Jesus: “Yet will I gather others to him, that have not been gathered unto him.” To him, that is to Israel or to the church, and so to him who is the head of Israel and the head of his church, even unto Christ must others be gathered.

While the promise is wide and continual, I cannot help remarking upon its being *most graciously encouraging*, because it evidently applies very pointedly to outcasts. “The Lord God which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather *others*.” Other outcasts are evidently intended. Does my voice reach anyone at this time who reckons himself an outcast? Has there strayed into this house of prayer an outcast from society? Harken thou to this word—“Yet will I gather others to him.” But if not an outcast from society, it may be you are an outcast in your own esteem. You judge that you have sinned beyond all hope; you consider yourself to be an unreasonable offender, an out-of-the-way rebel. Blessed be our great High Priest, he can “have compassion on the ignorant, and on those that are out of the way.” That text meets your case, does it not? I hear you cry, “Oh, but there is no hope for me.” Listen, “He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel, and yet will he gather others,”—why, then, is there no hope for you?

There is every hope for you. True, you have written your own condemnation, and you have signed and sealed it, and therefore you have made a covenant with death, and a league with hell, and given yourselves up to Satan: but your covenant with death shall be broken, and your league with hell shall be disannulled. By God's eternal grace, far off as you are, you shall find God's arm of mercy long enough to reach you; and weighed down with sin as you are, you shall find his hand of love strong enough to uplift you, for he will gather others such as he did gather of old,—more Magdalenes, more Matthews, more publicans and sinners, more of those who have a special claim to the name of "sinner." He will gather more of such, I know he will, blessed be his name, for so hath he promised in his word. How sweetly encouraging this should be to all of you that are sick of yourselves, and sick of your sins! There is no hope elsewhere, but there is hope in Jesus, for he is mighty to deliver, and "able to save to the uttermost." Trust ye in his name.

I admire greatly in my text the fact that *the promise is absolute*—"The Lord God which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him." He speaks like a king. This is the kind of language which only an omnipotent being can use as to men's minds. "Yet will I gather others." But they are free agents! "I will gather them," says he. But suppose they will not come. "Yet will I gather others unto him." Certain of my brethren are much taken up with the fact of man's free agency. I believe that he is a free agent, but it is by his free agency that he is lost. For salvation we must look alone to free grace, for there only is man's hope. God has a way and an art, without violating the free agency of man, of nevertheless accomplishing the purposes of his grace without let or hindrance. He saith, "Yet will I gather," as if he knew himself to be the master of the situation, and able to effect his resolve. There may be some in this house now who have never even thought of believing in the Lord Jesus up to this moment, yet he knows how to bring even these. Perhaps some have even said in defiance, "I will not come." Have you not heard of one who said, "I will not," but afterwards repented and went? Grace can turn you in the same manner, and make you act as you never dreamed of doing. Does this annoy you? Do you put your teeth together and say, "No, I will never alter: I will never be a religious man." I tell you to be less obstinate, for you know not how soon you will yield, and find yourself weeping over these hard speeches. Were you never subdued by *human* love? Did your mother never conquer you, young man, not with a threatening, but just with a look and a tear? Did your wife never vanquish you in the same fashion? You were a free agent, but yet you were a complete captive, and you could not help yourself. If my Master and Lord is but seen by you in all his love and loveliness, adorned not only with his tears of pity but with his wounds, wherewith in love he redeemed mankind, I warrant you your obstinacy will find itself dissolved. Oh, if you knew him! Would to God he would manifest himself to you now, and you would cry—

"I yield, by mighty love subdued,
Who can resist its charms?"

This is why the Lord talks so positively, because he knows his own

power, and means to put it forth. "Yet will I gather others unto him." So shall it be with you, dear hearer. With your full consent, against your own wicked will, the Lord will lead you to Jesus, and there shall you be found rejoicing to be united to him and to his people. May the promise thus divinely uttered be fulfilled in you who sit or stand before the preacher this day, and on those who shall read those words in days to come.

III. I desire for a little time, in the third place, to mention THE FACTS WHICH SUSTAIN OUR FAITH IN THIS PROMISE. We believe it, whether or no; fact or no fact, to back it up, God's word is sure; but still this will help some of you who have but slender confidence. The facts which sustain our faith in the text are many; here is just a handful of them.

The first is *the perpetuity of the gospel*. Still is the good news preached among you, dear hearers. Still are we bidden to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Now, we feel certain that if all God's people were saved already, our Master would say, "You need not go any further, there are no more to be gathered in." Suppose when the King came in to see the guests every seat at the banquet was full, then he would not say to the servants, "Go ye out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in;" but because our commission runs on, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned," and "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," we feel sure that there are more to be saved. If we are bidden to preach the gospel till the end of the world, it must be because to the very end of the world there are other souls to be called by grace. There are still to be harvests, for we are still sent to sow; there are still some fish to be caught, for we are still bidden to cast the net.

The next fact which helps our faith is this:—I will give it you in verse and you will recognise it none the less distinctly—

"Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
'Till all the ransomed church of God
Be saved to sin no more."

The blood of atonement has not lost its power, and therefore all the ransomed church of God is not yet saved; there are more to be washed, for the fountain is still open; there are more to be healed, for the Balm of Gilead is still set before us, there are more to be liberated, for the redemption price has not exhausted its value. Our Lord Jesus has redeemed so great a multitude from among men, and his precious blood is of such an infinite value that we know beyond all doubt that there must remain myriads more to be gathered into his church. Do you think that he bought a miserable handful of men? Is your little Bethel a fold large enough to hold all the ransomed? No, a number that no man can number shall be the fruit of his travail, and he has not as yet seen such a number following at his feet. There is still power to save in the atonement, and a wondrous mint of merit in the righteousness of our Lord, therefore its issues are not yet fully seen; much more must come of it. We are sure that our Lord's sacred passion must have a grander

result than we have yet seen, and he will gather others besides those that have been gathered unto him. My brethren, can your eyes look beyond the firmament and see the invisible? If so, mark that hard by the blazing throne of the Eternal there stands a man who is more than a man :—

“Adoring saints around him stand,
And thrones and powers before him fall ;
The God shines gracious through the Man,
And sheds sweet glories on them all.”

But how is this glorious One occupied? He is making intercession and pleading for his redeemed. “He is able, therefore, to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” So long as there is an intercessor at the throne of God there must be more sinners to be saved. If all were brought in he would cease his pleading, but while there is still a soul ignorant or out of the way the great High Priest will continue to urge his suit before the Eternal Majesty. More souls must be brought in, for Jesus lives to plead for that end.

Nor is this all, for we are sure that these purposes of grace are not yet fully accomplished, because *the Spirit of God is with us still*. He abides in the church, and he has come to convince men of sin : there must be more souls to be convinced. He has come to quicken men, and abides here, and therefore there must be more dead sinners to be quickened, or else his mission would be ended. There must be more to whom the things of Christ are to be revealed, or else the Spirit would not linger here as our Illuminator. The Spirit has not gone away ; in many of us he abides, and we feel his power ; the presence of the Spirit is a sure token that the promise is not spent ; it is still full of meaning, and others must yet be gathered beside those that are gathered unto him.

Nor is this all. *The glory and majesty of the gospel*, or rather the greatness of the glory of God in the gospel, demands that many more should be gathered than have as yet been enfolded in the church. At the largest computation, the Christian church of the present day is a poor minority of mankind ; and we do not believe it to be consistent with the majestic purposes of grace that at the winding up of affairs there should be a handful of saved ones against an awful multitude of the lost. No, in all things Jesus shall have the pre-eminence, and he will have it in this also, that his saved ones shall exceed the lost : this is our hope and confidence. Multitudes, multitudes, multitudes beyond all conception are yet to be brought to Messiah’s feet, they shall fly as a cloud, they shall hasten as doves to their dovecotes, they shall advance in strength like waves of the sea, and they shall cover the earth, being as the sand on the seashore, innumerable.

One other argument I put last, though it is not so strong as it might be. It may seem to be an anti-climax to finish with the weakest reason, but then it is one that needs to be made stronger, and because I want each believer here to strengthen it, I place it last, that it may not be forgotten. I know there must be many more souls to be ingathered because of *the longings of the saints*. They are not satisfied unless they see conversions ; they are anxious to hear the cry of penitents. I wish

they had far stronger longings and more intense anxieties. I know some Christians who are far too comfortable,—inhumanly insensible I call it, though even their own children are not converted. True saints are hungry and thirsty after souls; till men are saved they cannot rest. Nay, it has come to be with some of us far more than a longing or a thirsting, it has sharpened and deepened down into the very pangs of birth for souls. Many saints travail for souls; their hearts are in anguish until Christ be formed in others the hope of glory. Beloved, you know that when Zion travaile she brings forth children: this therefore is a token for good,—there are more souls to be gathered, for God must hear prayer, and many are praying. Do not his elect cry day and night unto him? Will he not hear them? Are there not multitudes of ministers, teachers, and all sorts of workers hunting for souls with heavenly ardour, and giving God no rest day nor night till he bring in the outcasts. There must, therefore, be many more souls to be gathered.

One thing I know, the church needs more conversions. We never prosper as a church unless we have a fresh stream of young blood running into us. Mark an old church with no converts, and see how diseased it is. It generally sours down into a crotchety, ill-tempered, bigoted little clique, of very little use in the world, wanting rather a pair of crutches with which to totter about its own floor than a sword with which to fight the foe. The church needs young blood in its veins. Our strength for holding the faith may be in experienced saints but our zeal for propagating it must be found in the young. We greatly need that new converts should be added to us, and therefore because we need it, and we feel confident that our God will supply all our need, we feel sure that he will increase us with men as with a flock. To keep his church alive and vigorous, he will lay hold upon Sauts and make Pauls of them. May this church be set on fire by the burning love of new-born souls. Though we have enjoyed a constant increase for nearly twenty-five years, may the Lord give us a far larger addition. It is his promise, let us plead it. *Others* besides those that have been gathered unto him we will ask him to give us; and just in proportion, my beloved brethren and sisters, as you and I begin to trouble about this, groan about it, pray about it, and cry about it, the Lord will fulfil his gracious promise, and others shall be gathered beside those that are gathered to him.

IV. I finish, therefore, with the fourth head, which is THE CONDUCT CONSISTENT WITH THIS PROMISE. Let us view this question with reference to God's people, I have already trenched upon that topic. The conduct congruous to the promise is to *believe it*, and then to *pray about it*. Let us at once get together in little knots of twos and threes, and seek to have the word fulfilled. This very afternoon enter into your chambers alone, or gather your families and hold little prayer-meetings with them. Remember this promise, and speak with the Lord concerning it. Perhaps you have not noticed its gracious utterances before, but now that it has come under your eye, be sure you make use of it. If a man finds that a cheque has been lying by him for a good while, and he comes upon it while turning over his letters, what will he do to-morrow morning? Why, he will go and get it cashed. Now, here is one of my Master's bills which you have not yet turned into actual money. Go and take it to the Lord; take it to-day, for the bank of heaven is open at

this moment—when is it closed? Go and get the word fulfilled unto you by praying, “Lord, thou hast said, Yet will I gather others that have not been gathered,” therefore fulfil this word unto thy servant. Having done this, you will have lifted up your hand to the Lord, and you cannot go back. If you pray, *you must work*, for prayer without endeavour is hypocrisy: the next thing after prayer is to go and gather in the others by speaking to them concerning Jesus and the way of salvation by faith in his precious blood. Go and use the grand gospel means, and then, because God has promised it, *expect to see others gathered*. Do not be thunderstruck when you hear of many being converted on a certain Sabbath through your speaking of Jesus Christ. Expect it—wonder that it does not happen oftener; and be on the look out for coming souls. *Look out for them* this morning. My Master has gathered some while I have been speaking, I feel sure of that. These new converts will feel quite lonely ere long unless you speak to them. They are like little children that are just born, and they need tender nursing; find them out and nurse them for the Lord and he will give you your wages. Try and speak a word of encouragement to those who for the first time are found hovering near the gospel; do not drive them away, but cheer them on. “Oh, but I am afraid I shall not find them.” If you speak so you will not find them; but if you are hopeful and believing you will find them fast enough, for they abound in these parts. Has not the Lord said that he will gather? Then be sure he will. You have asked him to fulfil his word, have you not? Then he will do it, beyond all doubt. Find out the hopeful ones, hear their troubles, and help them in their difficulties.

I am anxious that now, and for many months to come, all of you who are in Christ should be dwelling hourly on this word, and be continually saying, “Where are these *others*?” The Lord said, “Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered.” Where are these others? Perhaps at this time they have not come to this Tabernacle at all—they may be at some other house of prayer. Bless the Lord when other churches have their full share of increase, and souls are gathered into their ranks. But perhaps those whom the Lord will ingather are not at this time in any place of worship: go and find them in their homes and haunts. There are others to be gathered, look after the others. The first question of a saved man should be, “What can I do for my Lord?” and the next should be, “What can I do for others?” The more he knows Christ, and the greater his love, and the higher his enjoyment, the more should he cry, “Where are the others? What can I do for the others?” I am sure if you were all starving and ready to perish with famine, and I were to come with a good store of bread and call out half-a-dozen of you, and give you a good meal in the vestry, as soon as ever you had been fed you would cry, “Pray think of others. Thousands out there are starving, even as we were; pray give us bread for them as well as for ourselves.” How pleased you would be, each one, to go out and say, “There is a meal for all of you. There is no stint, you may eat to the full,—come along.” If they rejected your message you would feel very grieved, and you would plead with them—“Look at us, we have been fed: do not die here, but come and be fed also.” Some one would reply, “It is not good meat,” and you would answer, “Taste and see.” If one of you had a wife, and she was hungry, but would

not believe you, and come to the feast, you would plead with her even unto tears, and fear that she was insane. If you had children that would not come, and were dying with hunger, I think I know how their mothers would weep over them; how they would seek with loving entreaties to turn them from their infatuation and be induced to feed upon the bread so lovingly provided. We would not let them die if love could persuade them to be wise. The case is much the same spiritually: let us show a like earnestness.

As to what conduct is consistent with this text on the part of those who have not yet been gathered, it will be clear that they should be encouraged to hope. If I were a thief, and I read of the dying thief who rejoiced to see the fountain of atoning blood in his day, I would rejoice too and say, "If one thief was cleansed, why not another? Why not I? In the Bible are cases of very great sinners who nevertheless were washed from all their sins; I am like them in their sins, why should not I be as they were. More outcasts have to be gathered, then why not I amongst them? What should shut me out? I will go and try." In earthly things men seek promotion even when the hope is small. In the case of a vacancy in the Civil Service, I have heard of eight hundred applying for one situation. This was a poor chance, and yet many go in for it. But here we know that others are to be gathered, and those others not ones nor twos but thousands—why, then, should not a seeking soul put in for it? There never was one that did seek the Lord by faith who was refused yet. Never a single soul! He who comes to Jesus by a simple faith has never yet been refused. Come, my friend! Come now to Jesus! If he should cast you away, you will be number one upon the black list. We will place you here in the Tabernacle in a conspicuous seat, and we will show you as the first sinner that our Lord Jesus could not save. See, we will say, "Here is the first man that came to Jesus and Jesus rejected him." I shall alter all my preaching, for when I preach I shall say, "Jesus will in no wise cast out any that come to him, except one, and that one man sits in the Tabernacle." I shall tell them when I am preaching at Leeds during this week that Jesus Christ receives all sinners except one man, who was cast out at the Tabernacle last Sunday. I warrant you I will make your name ring round the world; the saints shall know it in heaven, and the devils will soon know it in hell, and they will triumph over the defeated Saviour. Why, man, you would be the first proof that God was not true, and that Christ was not gracious, and his blood is not omnipotent. Shall this ever be? You know better. Come along, and try the Saviour now! Rejected you shall never be. Oh that you would this morning yield to the gentle drawing of his almighty love. May you, dear brothers and sisters, be amongst those who shall say, "It is true, it is true that he gathers other outcasts, for he has gathered me into his fold, and I bless his sovereign grace, his irresistible love, and will bless him for ever and ever." Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm cxlvii.;
Isaiah lvi.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—907, 956, 508.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE HOPE LAID UP IN HEAVEN.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 13TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel."—Colossians i. 5.

THREE graces should be always conspicuous in Christians—faith, love, and hope. They are each mentioned by Paul in the opening verses of the epistle from which our text is taken. These lovely graces should be so conspicuous in every believer as to be spoken of, and consequently heard of even by those who have never seen us. These flowers should yield so sweet a perfume that their fragrance may be perceived by those who have never gazed upon them. So was it with the saints at Colosse. Paul says, "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we *heard* of your *faith* in Christ Jesus, and of the *love* which ye have to all the saints, for the *hope* which is laid up for you in heaven." May our characters be such as can be reported of without causing us to blush; but that can never be the case if these essential virtues are absent. If these things be in us and abound we shall not be barren or unfruitful, but if they be lacking we are as withered branches. We should, therefore, be rich in faith, which is the root of every grace; and to this end we should daily pray, "Lord, increase our faith." We should strive to be full even to overflowing with love, which is of God, and makes us like to God; and we should also abound in hope, even that heavenly hope which causeth a man to purify himself in readiness for the inheritance above. See ye to it that neither of these three divine sisters are strangers to your souls, but let faith, hope, and love take up their abode in your hearts.

Note, however, the special character of each of these graces as it exists in the Christian. It is not every faith and love and hope that will serve our turn, for of all precious things there are counterfeits. There is a kind of *faith* in all men, but ours is *faith in Christ Jesus*, faith in him whom the world rejects, whose cross is a stumblingblock, and whose doctrine is an offence. We have faith in the man of Nazareth, who is

also the Son of God, faith in him who having made atonement by his own blood once for all, is now exalted to his Father's right hand. Our confidence is not placed in ourselves, nor in any human priest nor in the traditions of our fathers, nor in the teachings of human wisdom, but alone in Christ Jesus. This is the faith of God's elect.

The *love* of Christians, too, is also special, for while a Christian man is moved by universal benevolence and desires to do good unto all men, yet he has a special love *unto all the saints*, and these the world loves not, because it loves not their Lord. The true believer loves the persecuted, the misrepresented, and despised people of God for Christ's sake. He loves them all, even though he may think some of them to be mistaken in minor matters; he has love to the babes in grace as well as to the grown saints, and love even to those saints whose infirmities are more manifest than their virtues. He loves them not for their station, or for their natural amiability, but because Jesus loves them, and because they love Jesus. You see the faith is in Christ Jesus, but the love extends beyond Christ himself to all those who are in union with him: while hope takes a still wider sweep, and includes the eternal future in its circuit; thus do our graces increase in range as well as in number.

Our *hope*, too, upon which we are to speak this morning, is special, because it is a hope which is laid up for us in heaven; a hope, therefore, which the worldling cares not one whit about. He hopes that to-morrow may be as this day, and yet more abundant, but he cares nothing for the land where time has ceased to flow. He hopes for riches, or he hopes for fame; he hopes for long life and prosperity; he hopes for pleasure and domestic peace; the whole range of his hope is within the compass of his eye: but our hope has passed beyond the sphere of sight, according to the word of the apostle, "What a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." Ours is a hope which demands nothing of time, or earth, but seeks its all in the world to come. It is of this hope that we are about to speak. May the Holy Spirit lead us into a profitable meditation upon it.

The connection of our text seems to be this: the apostle so much rejoiced when he saw the saints at Colosse possessing faith, love, and hope, that he thanked God and prayed about them. He saw these seals of God upon them, these three tokens that they were a really converted people, and his heart was glad. All the faithful ministers of Christ rejoice to see their people adorned with the jewels of faith, and love, and hope; for these are their ornament for the present, and their preparation for the future. This I believe to be the connection, but yet from the form of the language it is clear that the apostle intended to state that their love to the saints was very much produced in them by the hope which was laid up in heaven. You notice the word "for," which stands there: "The love which ye have to all the saints for," or *on account of*, or *because of*, "the hope which is laid up for you in heaven." There can be no doubt that the hope of heaven tends greatly to foster love to all the saints of God. We have a common hope, let us have a common affection: we are on our way to God, let us march in loving company; we are to be one in heaven, let us be one on earth. One is our Master and one is our service; one is our way and one is our end; let us be knit together as one man. We all of us expect to see our Well-beloved

face to face, and to be like him; why should we not even now love all those in whom there is anything of Christ? Brethren, we are to live together for ever in heaven: it is a pity we should quarrel. We are for ever to be with Jesus Christ, partakers of the same joy, of the same glory, and of the same love; why should we be scant in our love to each other? On the way to Canaan we have to fight the same enemy, to publish the same testimony, to bear the same trials, and to fly to the same helper: therefore let us love one another. It were not difficult to show that the hope which is laid up in heaven should be productive of love among the saints on earth. This connection of my text with the clause immediately before it does not at all prevent its being regarded in the sense which I first mentioned, namely, that it was a subject for joy with the apostle that the Colossians had faith and love and hope; for he would rejoice none the less because their faith was fostered by their hope. It commendeth these sweet graces, that they are so wonderfully intertwined with each other and dependent upon one another. There would be no love to the saints if there were not faith in Christ Jesus, and if there were not faith in Christ Jesus there would be no hope laid up in heaven. If we had no love it would be certain that we had no true faith, and if we had no hope, faith would be assuredly absent. If we entertain one of the graces we must receive her sisters, for they cannot be separated. Here are three brilliants set in the same golden setting, and none must break the precious jewel. "Now abideth faith, hope and love, these three," and blessed is he who hath them abiding in his own heart.

Now we will let faith and love stand by for a little while, and we will talk about hope, the hope mentioned in our text, the hope which is laid up for you in heaven. First, *it is a very marvellous hope*; secondly, *it is a very secure hope*; and thirdly, *it is a very powerfully influential hope*. May the Holy Ghost bless these three thoughts to us all.

I. First, then, we speak of our hope which is laid up for us in heaven as a **VERY MARVELLOUS HOPE**, and it is so, if we only consider that *it is a great act of grace that sinners should have a hope at all*. That when man had broken his Maker's law there should remain a hope for him is a thought which should make our hearts leap with gratitude. Do you not recollect when you felt it to be so? When sin lay heavily upon your conscience Satan came and wrote over the lintel of your door, "**NO HOPE**," and the grim sentence would have stood there to this day had not a loving hand taken the hyssop, and by a sprinkling of precious blood removed the black inscription. "Wherefore remember that at that time ye were without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world." That was our condition once; and it is a marvellous thing that it should be thoroughly changed, and that assurance should have taken the place of despair. In our carnal estate many false hopes, like will-o'-the-wisps, danced before us, deceived us, and led us into bogs of presumption and error, but we really had no hope. This is a dreadful condition for a man to be in: it is, indeed, the very worst of all; never is the storm so terrible as when in the howling of the winds the man distinctly hears the words "**No hope**." Yet into the thick darkness of **NO HOPE** we once steered our course, and each time we tried to rely upon good works, outward ceremonies, and good resolutions, we were disappointed anew, and the words

rung into our souls with dread monotony, "No hope, no hope," until we were fain to lie down and die. Now, sinners though we be, we have a hope. Ever since by faith we looked to Jesus on the cross, a hope full of glory has taken possession of our hearts. Is not this a marvellous thing?

More marvellous still is it *that our hope should venture to be associated with heaven*. Can there be heaven for such as we are? It seems almost presumptuous for a sinner who so richly deserves hell even to lift up his eyes towards heaven. He might have some hope of purgatory, if there were such a region, but a hope of heaven, is not that too much? Yet, brethren, we have no fear of hell or of purgatory now, but we expect to taste the joys laid up in heaven. There is no purgatory for anyone, and there is no hell for saints, heaven awaits all believers in Jesus. Our hope is full of glory, for it has to do with the glory of Christ, whom we hope to behold. Dost thou expect then, thou who wast black with lust, that thou shalt sit among the angels? "Ay, that I do," saith the believer, "and nearer to the throne than they." And thou who hast plunged into every form of uncleanness, dost thou expect to see God, for none but the pure in heart can behold him? "Aye, that I do," saith he, "and not only to see him, but to be like his Son, when I see him as he is." What a divine hope is this! Not that we shall sit down on heaven's doorstep, and hear stray notes of the songs within, but that we shall sing with the happy band; not that we shall have an occasional glance within the gates of pearl, and feel our hearts hankering after the unutterable joys within the sacred enclosure, but we shall actually and personally enter into the halls of the palace, and see the king in his beauty in the land which is very far off. This is a brave hope, is it not? Why, she aspireth to all that the best of saints have received, she looketh for the same vision of glory, the same ecstasy of delight; she even aspireth to sit upon the throne of Christ, according to the promise, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." Hope reckons to be among the overcomers, and to partake in their enthronement. This is marvellous hope for a struggling believer to entertain; yet it is not presumption, but confidence warranted by the word of God. Is it not a miracle of love that such poor creatures as ourselves should be enabled thus to hope in God?

This hope is the more marvellous because *it is so substantial*. In our text the apostle scarcely seems to be speaking of the grace of hope, since that can hardly be said to be laid up in heaven, but dwells in our bosoms: he rather speaks of the *object* of hope, and yet it is clear that in his mind the grace of hope as well as the object must have been intended, because that which is laid up in heaven is not a hope except to those who hope for it; it is clear that no man has a hope laid up in heaven, unless he has hope within himself. The truth is that the two things—the grace of hope and its object—are here mentioned under one term, which may be intended to teach us that when hope is wrought in the heart by the Holy Ghost, it is the thing hoped for, even as faith is the thing believed, because it realizes and secures it. Just as faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen, so is hope the substance of the thing it expects, and the evidence of the thing it cannot see.

Paul in this case, as in many others, uses language rather according to the theological sense which he would convey than according to the classical usage of the Greek tongue. The words of a heathen people must be somewhat strained from their former use if they are to express divine truth, and Paul does thus stretch them to their utmost length in this case. The hope of the true believer is so substantial that Paul even speaks of it as though it were the thing itself, and were laid up in heaven. Many a man hath a hope of wealth, but that hope is a different thing from being wealthy. There is many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip, smith the old proverb, and how true it is! A man may have a hope of old age, yet he may never reach even middle life, and thus it is clear that the hope of long life is not in itself longevity; but he that hath the divine hope which grows out of faith and love hath a hope which shall never be disappointed, so that the apostle speaks of it as being identical with the thing hoped for, and describes it as laid up in heaven. What a marvellous hope is this which long before its realization is treated as a matter of actual attainment, and spoken of as a treasure reserved in the coffers of heaven!

One marvellous point about our hope is this, that *it is the subject of divine revelation*. No one could ever have invented this hope, it is so glorious as to baffle imagination. The prince of dreamers could never have dreamed it, nor the master of the art of logic have inferred it by reason: imagination and understanding are both left upon the ground, while the Bible idea of heaven soars upward like a strong-winged angel. The eternal hope had to be revealed to us; we should never have known it else, for the apostle says, "Whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel." That a sinful man should have a hope of enjoying the perfect bliss of Paradise is a thing not to be thought of, were it not that the Lord hath promised it. I say again, imagination's utmost stretch had never reached to this, neither could we have had the presumption to suppose that such a bliss could be in store for men so unworthy and undeserving, had we not been assured thereof by the word of God. But now the word of God hath opened a window in heaven and bidden us look therein and hope for the time when we shall drink of its living fountains of waters, and go no more out for ever.

This is marvellous, and it is even more marvellous to think that *this hope came to us simply by hearing*. "Whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel." "Faith cometh by hearing," and hope comes by faith; and so the divine hope of being in heaven came to us by hearing,—not by working, not by deserving, not by penance and sacrifice, but simply by hearkening diligently unto the divine word, and believing unto life. We heard that the pierced hand of Jesus had opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers, and we believed, and saw a way of entrance into the holiest by his blood. We heard that God had prepared for them that love him joys indescribable, and we believed the message, trusting in his Son. Our confidence is in the word which we have heard, for it is written, "Hear and your soul shall live"; and we find that by hearing our confidence is strengthened, and our heart filled with inward assurance and joyful expectation, therefore do we love the word more and more. Will we not prize to the uttermost that sacred word which has brought us such a hope? Yes, that we will, till we exchange

hearing for seeing, and the message of Jesus for Jesus himself, we will always lend a willing ear to the testimony of Jesus.

This hope is marvellous, once more, because *the substance of it is most extraordinary*. Brethren, what is the hope which is laid up for us in heaven? It would need many a sermon to bring out all the phases of delight which belong to that hope. It is the hope of *victory*, for we shall overcome every foe, and Satan shall be trodden under our feet. A palm of victory is prepared for our hands, and a crown for our heads. Our life struggle shall not end in defeat, but in complete and eternal triumph, for we shall overcome through the blood of the Lamb. Nor do we hope for victory only: but in our own persons we shall possess *perfection*. We shall one day cast off the slough of sin, and shall be seen in the beauty of our new-born life. Truly, "it doth not yet appear what we shall be," but when we think of the matchless character of our Lord Jesus, we are overjoyed by the assurance that "we shall be like him." What an honour and a bliss for the younger brethren to be like the first-born! To what higher honour could God himself exalt us? I know not of aught which could surpass this. Oh, matchless joy to be as holy, harmless, and undefiled as our own beloved Lord! How delightful to have no propensity to sin remaining in us nor trace of its ever having been there; how blissful to perceive that our holy desires and aspirations have no weakness or defect remaining in them. Our nature will be perfect and fully developed, in all its sinless excellence. We shall love God, as we do now, but oh how much more intensely! We shall rejoice in God, as we do now, but oh what depth there will be in that joy! We shall delight to serve him, as we do now, but there will then be no coldness of heart, no languor of spirit, no temptation to turn aside. Our service will be as perfect as that of angels. Then shall we say to ourselves without fear of any inward failure, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name." There will be no recreant affection then; no erring judgment, no straying passion, no rebellious lust: there will remain nothing which can defile, or weaken, or distract. We shall be perfect, altogether perfect. This is our hope—victory over evil and perfection in all that is good. If this were all our hope it would be marvellous, but there is more to be unfolded.

We expect to enjoy *security* also from every danger. As there will be no evil in us, so there will be none around us or about us to cause us alarm. No temporal evil, such as pain, bereavement, sorrow, labour, or reproach shall come near us: all will be security, peace, rest, and enjoyment. No mental evil will intrude upon us in heaven; no doubts, no staggering difficulties, no fears, no bewilderments will cause us distress. Here we see through a glass darkly, and we know in part, but there shall we see face to face, and know even as we are known. Oh, to be free from mental trouble! What a relief will this be to many a doubting Thomas! This is a marvellous hope. And then no spiritual enemy will assail us, no world, no flesh, no devil will mar our rest above. What will you make out of it, ye tried ones? Your Sabbaths are very sweet now on earth, but when they are over you have to return to yon cold world again; but there your Sabbath shall never end, and your separation from the wicked will be complete. It will be a strange sensation for you to find no Monday morning, no care to be renewed, no toil to be encountered, no

harness to be buckled on afresh; above all, no sin to be dreaded, no temptation to be escaped. Heaven is so peaceful that the storms of earth are there unknown, the stirrings of the flesh are never felt, and the howlings of the dog of hell are never heard. There all is peace and purity, perfection and security for ever.

With this security will come perfect *rest*: "Yea, saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours." Heavenly rest is quite consistent with *continual service*, for, like the angels, we shall rest on the wing, and find it rest to serve God day and night. But there you shall not toil till the sweat bedaws your face, neither shall the sun smite you, nor any heat. No weary limb nor fevered brain shall follow upon the blessed service of the glory-land. It is a paradise of pleasure, and a palace of glory; it is a garden of supreme delights, and a mansion of abiding love; it is an everlasting *sabbatismos*, a rest which never can be broken, which evermore remaineth for the people of God; it is a kingdom where all are kings, an inheritance where all are heirs. My soul panteth for it. Is not this a charming hope? Did I not say well when I declared it to be marvellous?

Nor is this all, brethren, for we expect to enjoy in heaven a *happiness* beyond compare. Eye hath not seen it, nor ear heard it, nor hath the heart conceived it; it surpasses all carnal joy. We know a little of it, for the Lord hath revealed it unto us by the Spirit, who searcheth all things, even the deep things of God; yet what we know is but a mere taste of the marriage feast: enough to make us long for more, but by no means sufficient to give us a complete idea of the whole banquet. If it be so sweet to preach about Christ, what must it be to see him and be with him? If it be so delightful to be ravished by the music of his name, what must it be to lie in his bosom? Why, if these few clusters of Eshcol which are now and then brought to us are so sweet, what will it be to abide in the vineyard, where all the clusters grow? If that one bucketful from the well of Bethlehem tasted so sweetly that we scarce dared to drink it, but poured it out before the Lord as a thankoffering, what a joy will it be to drink at the well-head without stint for ever? O to be eternally at the right hand of God, where there are pleasures for evermore!

This is our hope, and yet there is more, for we have the hope of everlasting *fellowship* with Christ. I would give ten thousand worlds, if I had them, to have one glimpse of that dear face, which was marred with sorrow for my sake; but to sit at my Lord's feet and look up into his countenance, and hear his voice, and never, never grieve him, but to participate in all his triumphs and glories for ever and for ever,—what a heaven will this be? Then shall we have fellowship with all his saints, in whom he is glorified, and by whom his image is reflected; and thus shall we behold fresh displays of his power and beamings of his love. Is not this surpassing bliss? Said I not well when I declared that ours is a marvellous hope? Had I eloquence and could pile on goodly words, and could a poet assist me with his sweetest song, to tell of the bliss and joy of the eternal world, yet must preacher and poet both confess their inability to describe the glory to be revealed in us. The noblest intellect and the sweetest speech could not convey to you so much as a thousandth part of the bliss of heaven.

There I leave the first head. It is a very marvellous hope.

II. Secondly, let us remark that IT IS A MOST SECURE HOPE. It is so according to the text, because it is *laid up* or secured. The recent calamities which have occurred in connection with the Glasgow City Bank will make business men very careful where they lay up their treasures; but no one can entertain any fear of the safety of that which God himself takes under his charge. If your hope is laid up with him it becomes sinful to doubt its security. It is "laid up," the text says, and this means that it is hidden in a safe place like a treasure which is well secured. We find it hard to lay up our valuables safely in this world because thieves break through and steal; the iron safe, the strong room, and all sorts of inventions are employed to preserve them from felonious grip; but when God becomes the guardian of our treasure he lays it up where none can touch it, and neither man nor devil can steal it. Our hope is laid up just as crowns and wreaths were laid up at the Grecian games for those who gained them: no one could snatch them away from their rightful owners, but the rewards were safely retained for the winners, to be distributed when the contest was over. You see not as yet your hope, beloved, but it is laid up: it is hidden with Christ in God, and made as safe as the throne of God himself.

Notice the next word, it is laid up "*for you*." It is something to have your hope laid up, but it is much better to have it laid up for yourself. "*Laid up for you*"; that is, for you whose faith is in Christ Jesus, and who have love to all the saints. There is a crown in heaven which will never be worn by any head but yours; there is a harp in glory that never will be touched by any finger but yours. Make no mistake about it; it is laid up in heaven *for you*, "reserved in heaven *for you*, who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation." "*For you*";—"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give *you* the kingdom." Lay the stress there, and get honey out of it. "*Laid up for you*."

Where is it laid up? The next word tells us. "*Laid up for you in heaven*," "where," says the Saviour as though he were expounding the text, "neither moth nor rust doth corrupt." This means that no process of decay will cause your treasure to become stale and worn out; no secret moth will eat the garments of heaven's courtiers, and no rust will tarnish the brightness of their crowns. Our Lord adds, "Nor do thieves break through nor steal." We cannot imagine a burglar's breaking through the walls of heaven. We could not imagine Satan himself undermining the bastions of the New Jerusalem, or leaping over the bulwarks which guard the city of the Great King. If your hope is laid up in heaven it must be perfectly safe. If your hope lies in the bank, it may break; if it lies in an empire, it may melt away; if it lies in an estate, the title-deeds may be questioned; if it lies in any human creature, death may bereave you; if it lies in yourself, it is deceitful altogether: but if your hope is laid up in heaven, how secure it is. Be glad, and bless the Lord.

To show how secure is our hope, the apostle tells us that we have an indisputable certificate and guarantee for it. He says, "We heard of it in the word of the truth of the gospel." Notice these three emphatic words—"In the word of the truth of the gospel." First, "In the word."

What word is that? Man's word? Man's words are so much wind. But this is God's word, the same word that made heaven and earth, a word of power which cannot fail and of truth which cannot lie. You first hear of this blessed hope through the word of God, and that word is the best of evidence. You know how a person will say, "My word for it"—here you have God's word for it. We take a good man's word freely; and will we not take God's word much more readily? You have the word of God for the sure hope that believers in Christ Jesus shall be blessed for ever: is not this security enough?

Our text goes on to say, "the word of *the truth*": so, then, it is not a word of guess, conjecture, or of probable inference, but of infallible truth. My brethren of the modern school, my wise brethren, have a word of excogitation, and outcome, and development; but the word the apostle preached was "the word of *the truth*"—something positive, dogmatic, and certain. Ugly as the word may sound, the Lord grant that we may never be ashamed of the thing *called* dogmatism nowadays, which is none other than faith in God's truth. We believe the word of God not only to be true, but to be "the word of *the truth*." "Let God be true and every man a liar." There may be other true things in the world, but God's word is the essence of truth, *the truth* beyond all things else that may be true, for he hath said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall never pass away." The apostle saith in another place, "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

Note the next word, "The word of the truth of *the gospel*," or of the good news. That is to say, the sum and substance of the good news is to be found in this glorious hope. If you extract the essence of the gospel, and get *the truth*, which is the central germ of the glad tidings, you come at that blessed hope most sure and steadfast, which entereth into that within the veil.

Now, then, before your God-created hope can fail the word of God will have to be broken, but the word of God cannot be broken: the truth will have to fail, but the truth abideth for ever, and is by force of its own nature eternal; and the gospel will have to be disproved, but that cannot be, since the glory of God is made to hang upon it. Ye have heard it, then, "in the word of the truth of the gospel," what better assurance do you need? Hold to it and rejoice in it, and you shall never be ashamed of your hope.

III. I close by saying that IT IS A MOST POWERFULLY INFLUENTIAL HOPE. Brethren, I have already said to you that this hope is *the parent and nurse of love*, because the text says, "The love which ye have to all the saints for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven." Now, that is no trifling fountain of action which leads believing hearts to love, since love is always a working grace. Oh, for more love in this distracted world. Whatsoever in this world promotes Christian love is to be admired, and since the hope that we shall be for ever together before the throne of God lifts us above the little disagreements of society, and makes us affectionate to each other, it is a thing to cultivate with care.

Love is one part of the powerful operation of hope upon ourselves, but

hopefulness affects others also. Where the hopefulness of saints is conspicuous, it leads ministers and gracious people to give thanks to God. Paul says, "We give thanks to God and the Father, praying always for you since we heard of your hope." I do not know a greater delight that a minister can have than the thought of all his people entering the bliss of heaven, and of his meeting them all there. We hardly have time to know each other here below; we have loved each other in the Lord, and we have striven together in the service of God, and some of us are old fellow-soldiers now, after many years of Christian warfare, how pleasant it will be to dwell together above world without end! Some have gone home whom we dearly loved, and would almost have detained if we could; and there are others among us who in the order of nature will soon be translated; happy are we because we cannot long be separated. The age of some among us prophesies their speedy departure, and foreshadows that they will soon go over to the majority: but it is a most blessed reflection that all of us who are in Christ shall meet together above. We shall have ample room and verge enough for fellowship when we have reached eternity, and what will our joy be then! Perhaps some of you will say to me when we converse in heavenly language,— "You remember talking to us concerning the blessed hope on that fine Lord's-day morning, but you did not know much about it. We said then, 'The half has not been told us'; but now we perceive you did not tell us the one-hundredth part. Still we were glad to share in the joy of what little we did know, and in the blessed hope of knowing so much more." Oh yes, dear friends, because the hope of heaven in us helps to make other people thank God on our account, it is a sweet grace and mightily influential, and the more we have of it the better.

Moreover, hearing of their hope, *led the apostle to pray*, and if you will follow me in reading the words which succeed the text, you will see what he desired for his friends at Colosse. In the ninth verse you will see what he prayed for. He says, "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." Having believed in Jesus, and loving his people, you are going to heaven; and so Paul says "I desire that you be filled with the knowledge of his will," and well may he so desire, since to do that will is the joy and business of heaven. Is not our prayer, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"? Brethren, let us learn the will of the Lord now, and so be educated for the skies. Here we are to go through our apprenticeship, that we may be able to take up our freedom as citizens of the New Jerusalem. Here we are at school, preparing to take our degree above among the instructed saints of God. Are we to enter heaven ignorant of what the will of the Lord is? Surely we ought to know something of the ways of the place, something of the rules of the court. This part of our life below is intended to be a prelude to our life above, a preparation for perfection. Here below we undergo the tuning of the instruments. It is not meet that there should be discordant scrapings and screwings of strings in heaven. No, let us do all that here. Let us have our harps tuned below, so that when we reach the orchestra of the skies we may take our right place, and drop into the right note directly. A good hope should make you eager to know the

will of the Lord. It should purify you even as Christ is pure, and make you anxious to begin the perfect service of heaven while yet you linger below.

Then the apostle prays "that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." Is it not fit that you who are to rise to Enoch's heaven should walk as he did, and have this testimony that you please God? You are going to dwell at God's right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore, would not you wish to do all you can to please your Lord before you see him? You are a son of a king: you have not put on your glittering array as yet; your crown is not yet on your head; but surely you wish to behave yourself as becometh one who is fore-ordained for so much honour and glory. If a son is in a distant country and is coming home, he begins to think "What can I take home? What can I do to please the beloved father whom I am soon to see?" Begin, beloved, to see what you can do to please God, because you are so soon to enter into his pleasure, and dwell with those that wear white robes, "for they are worthy."

Next he says, "Being fruitful in every good work." Why, if there is to be such a rich reward of grace, let us bear all the gracious fruit we can, and if the time of working is so soon to be over, let us be instant in every holy labour while yet the season is with us. Who wants to go into heaven empty-handed? Who wishes to spend the time of his sojourning here in idleness? Oh no; let us seek to be fruitful to the glory of God that so we may have an abundant entrance into the kingdom.

The apostle further adds, "Increasing in the knowledge of God." If I am going to dwell with God, let me know somewhat of him; let me search his word and see how he has revealed himself; let me endeavour to have fellowship with him and his Son Jesus that I may know him. How can I enter heaven as a total stranger to him who is the king of it? Is not the knowledge of God as needful as it is desirable? Those who have a good hope of heaven will not rest without knowing the Lord, from the least even to the greatest of them. If anyone were to make you a present of a great estate, no matter in what country it might be situated, you would feel an interest in the land and its neighbourhood, and before nightfall you would be found enquiring about the place. No matter how rustic the neighbourhood or remote the locality, you would set your thoughts towards it if you knew the estate to be yours. As a usual thing, one of the driest documents in all the world is a rich man's will. If you have ever heard one read you will know how it presses on and on in that rigmorole fashion dear to lawyers: but if you are present when it is read to the family, please notice how "my son John's" eyes clear up when it comes to the clause which concerns himself, and how even the aged countenance of "my faithful servant Jane" brightens when her small legacy is mentioned. Everyone is on the alert when his own interests are affected. Even so he that hath a hope in heaven and an interest in Christ's great testament, will at once take an interest in divine things, and will desire to increase in the knowledge of God.

Once again, the apostle says, "strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness." A hope of heaven is a mighty strengthener for bearing the ills of life and the persecutions of the adversary. "It will soon be over," says

a man who looks for heaven, and therefore he is not over-weighted with grief. "It is an ill lodging," said the traveller, "but I shall be away in the morning." Well may we be strengthened with all might by the hope of heaven: it is but reason that the exceeding weight of glory should cast into the shade this light affliction, which is but for a moment.

You will say, "But have you not wrought this part of the chapter into your subject without any warrant?" No. Here is my warrant in the next verse: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." I have been following the evident track of the apostle's thoughts, The Lord gives us a hope of glory, and then he gives us a meetness for it, and that meetness is largely wrought in us by the Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of our hope. Cultivate, then, your hope, dear brethren. Make it to shine so plainly in you that your minister may hear of your hopefulness and joy; cause observers to take note of it, because you speak of heaven, and act as though you really expected to go there. Make the world know that you have a hope of heaven: make worldlings feel that you are a believer in eternal glory, and that you hope to be where Jesus is. Often surprise them as they see what they call your simplicity, but what is in truth only your sincerity, while you treat as matter of fact the hope laid up for you in heaven. The Lord grant it for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Colossians i.

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RECEIVING THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS A LITTLE CHILD.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 20TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein."—Luke xviii. 17.

WHEN our Lord blessed the little children he was making his last journey to Jerusalem. It was thus a farewell blessing which he gave to the little ones, and it reminds us of the fact that among his parting words to his disciples, before he was taken up, we find the tender charge, "Feed my lambs." The ruling passion was strong upon the great Shepherd of Israel, "who gathereth the lambs with his arm, and carrieth them in his bosom"; and it was fitting that while he was making his farewell journey he should bestow his gracious benediction upon the children.

Beloved, our Lord Jesus Christ is not here among us in person; but we know where he is, and we know that he is clothed with all power in heaven and in earth wherewith to bless his people; let us then draw near to him this day. Let us seek his touch in the form of fellowship, and ask the aid of his intercession; let us include others in our prayers, and among these let us give our children, and, indeed, all children, a leading place. We know more of Jesus than the women of Palestine did; let us, therefore, be even more eager than they were to bring our children to him that he may bless them, and that they may be accepted in him, even as we ourselves are. Jesus waits to bless. He is not changed in character, or impoverished in grace; as he still receiveth sinners, so doth he still bless children; and let none of us be content, whether we be parents or teachers, until he has received our children, and has so blessed them that we are sure that they have entered the kingdom of God.

Our Saviour, when he saw that his disciples were not only backward to admit the children to him, but even rebuked those who brought them, was much displeased, and called them to him that he might teach them better. He then informed them that, instead of the children being regarded as intruders, they were most welcome to himself; and, instead

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of being interlopers, they had full right of access, for of children and of childlike persons his kingdom was composed. Moreover, he declared that none could enter that kingdom except in the same manner as children enter. He spoke with divine certainty, using his own expressive "verily," and he spoke with the weight of his own personal authority, "I say unto you." These prefatory expressions are intended to secure our reverent attention to the fact that so far from the admission of children into the kingdom being unusual or strange, none can find entrance there except they receive the gospel as a little child receives it. It is this statement of the Master which affords us a subject for this morning, which may the divine Spirit open up to us and impress upon our hearts.

I shall speak upon three matters; first, upon *the secret thought of the disciples*, which the Master refuted by the language of the text; secondly, upon *the open declaration of our Lord* in the text; and, thirdly, upon *the encouragement which he thus gives to us*.

I. To begin with, let me deal with THE SECRET THOUGHT OF THE DISCIPLES, expressed by their actions though not spoken in words.

And, first, it is pretty clear that the disciples thought *the children were too insignificant* for the Lord's time to be taken up by them. If it had been a prince who wished to come to Jesus, no doubt Peter and the rest of them would have diligently secured him an introduction; but, you see, these were only poor women, with babes, and boys, and girls. If it had been an ordinary person, like themselves, they would not have repelled him with rebukes. But mere children! Sucklings and little children! It was too bad for these to be intruded upon the great Teacher. A word is used about the youthful applicants which may signify children of any age, from sucklings up to twelve years: surely Jesus had worry enough without the intrusion of these juveniles. He had higher subjects for thought, and graver objects of care. The children were so very little, they were quite beneath his notice: so the disciples thought in their hearts. But, brethren, if it comes to a matter of insignificance, who among us can hope to win the divine attention? If we think that children must be little in his sight, what are we? He taketh up the isles as a very little thing; the inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers; yea, we are all as things of nought. If we were humble we should exclaim "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" If we dream that the Lord will not notice the little and insignificant, what think we of such a text as this—"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father"? Doth God care for sparrows, and shall he not care for little children? The idea of insignificance must be set aside at once. "Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly." But are little children so insignificant? Do they not people heaven? Is it not your conviction? it is mine—that they make up a very considerable part of the population of the skies. Multitudes of infant feet are treading the streets of the New Jerusalem. Snatched from the breast ere they had committed actual sin, delivered from the toilsome pilgrimage of life, they always behold the face of our Father which is in heaven. "Of such is the kingdom of God." Call you these insignificant? Children, who are the most numerous company in the army of the

elect, dare you despise them? I might turn the tables, and call the adults insignificant, among whom there can be found no more than a small remnant who serve the Lord. Besides, many children are spared to grow up to man's estate, and therefore we must not think a child insignificant. He is the father of the man. In him are great possibilities and capacities. His manhood is as yet undeveloped, but it is there, and he that trifles with it mars the man. He who tempts the mind of a boy may destroy the soul of a man. A little error injected into the ear of a youth may become deadly in the man when the slow poison shall at last have touched a vital part. Weeds sown in the furrows of childhood will grow with the young man's growth, ripen in his prime, and only decay into a sad corruption when he himself declines. On the other hand, a truth dropped into a child's heart will there fructify, and his manhood shall see the fruit of it. Yon child listening in the class to his teacher's gentle voice may develop into a Luther, and shake the world with his vehement proclamation of the truth. Who among us can tell? At any rate, with the truth in his heart the boy shall grow up to honour and fear the Lord, and thus shall he help to keep alive a godly seed in these evil days. Therefore let no man despise the young, or think them insignificant. I claim a front place for them. I ask that, if others are kept back, at any rate their feebleness may make room for the little ones. They are the world's future. The past has been and we cannot alter it; even the present is gone while we gaze on it; but our hope lies in the future: therefore, by your leave, sirs, room for the children, room for the boys and girls.

Again, I suppose that these grown-up apostles thought that *the children's minds were too trifling*. They are at their play and their childish mirth: they will regard it only as a pastime to be folded in Jesus' arms; it will be mirth to them, and they will have no idea of the solemnity of their position. Well! well! Trifling is it? Children are said to be guilty of trifling! Oh, sirs, and are not ye also triflers? If it comes to an examination upon the matter of trifling, who are the greatest triflers, children or full-grown men and women? What is greater trifling than for a man to live for the enjoyment of sensual pleasures, or for a woman to live to dress herself and waste her time in company? Nay more, what is the accumulation of wealth for the sake of it but miserable trifling? Child's play without the amusement! Most men are triflers on a larger scale than children, and that is the main difference. Children when they trifle play with little things—their toys so breakable, are they not made on purpose to be trifled with and broken? The child with his trifles is but doing as he should. Alas, I know men and women who trifle with their souls, and with heaven and hell and eternity; they trifle with God's word, trifle with God's Son, trifle with God himself! Charge not children with being frivolous, for their little games often have as much of earnestness about them, and are as useful, as the pursuits of men. Half the councils of our senators and the debates of our parliaments are worse than child's play. The game of war is a far greater folly than the most frolicsome of boyish tricks. Big children are worse triflers than the little ones can ever be. Despise not children for trifling when the whole world is given to folly.

"Aw" saw they, "but if we should let the children come to Christ,

and if he should bless them, *they will soon forget it*. No matter how loving his look and how spiritual his words, they will go back to their play, and their weak memories will preserve no trace of it at all." This objection we meet in the same manner as the others. Do not men forget? What a forgetful generation do most preachers address! Verily this is a generation like to that of which Isaiah said, "Precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little." Alas, many of our hearers must have the gospel preached to them again, and again, and again, till the preacher is well nigh weary with his hopeless task; for they are like to men who see their natural faces in a glass, and go their way to forget what manner of men they are. They live in sin still. The Word has no abiding place in their hearts. Forgetfulness! Charge not children with it lest the accusation be proven against yourselves.

But do the little ones forget? I suppose the events which we best remember in advanced age are the things which happened to us in our earliest days. At any rate, I have shaken hands with grey-headed men who have forgotten nearly all the events which have intervened between their old age and the time of their childhood, but little matters which transpired at home, hymns learned at their mother's knee, and words spoken by their father or sister have lingered with them. The voices of childhood echo throughout life. The first learned is generally the last forgotten. The young children who heard our Lord's blessing would not forget it. They would have his countenance photographed upon their hearts and never forget his kind and tender smile. Peter, and James, and John, and the rest of you, are all mistaken, and therefore you must suffer the children to come to Jesus.

Perhaps, too, they thought that children *had not sufficient capacity*. Jesus Christ said such wonderful things that the children could not be supposed to have the capacity to receive them. Yet, indeed, this is a great error; for children readily enter into our Lord's teaching. They never learn to read so quickly from any book as from the New Testament. The words of Jesus are so childlike and so fitted for children that they drink them in better than the words of any other man, however simple he may try to be. Children readily understand the child Jesus. What is this matter of capacity? What capacity is wanted? Capacity to believe? I tell you children have more of that than grown-up persons. I am not now speaking of the spiritual part of faith, but as far as the mental faculty is concerned, there is any quantity of the capacity for faith in the heart of a child. His believing faculty has not yet been overloaded by superstition, or perverted by falsehood, or maimed by wicked unbelief. Only let the Holy Spirit consecrate the faculty and there is enough of it for the production of abundant faith in God.

In what respect are children deficient of capacity? Do they lack capacity for repentance? Assuredly not: have I not seen a girl weep herself ill because she has done wrong? A tender conscience in many a little boy has made him unutterably miserable when he has been conscious of a fault. Do not some of us recollect the keen arrows of conviction which rankled in our hearts when we were yet children? I distinctly recollect the time when I could not rest because of sin, and sought the Lord, while yet a child, with bitter anguish. Children are

capable enough of repentance, God the Holy Spirit working it in them: this is no conjecture, for we ourselves are living witnesses.

What, then, do children want in the matter of capacity? "Why, they have not sufficient understanding," says one. Understanding—of what? If the religion of Jesus were that of modern thought, if it were such sublime nonsense that none but the so-called "cultured" class could make head or tail of it, then children might be incapable of its comprehension: but if it be indeed the gospel of the poor man's Bible, then there are shallows in it where the tiniest lamb in Jesus' fold may wade without fear of being carried off its feet. It is true that in the Scriptures there are great mysteries, where your leviathans may dive and find no bottom; but the knowledge of these deep things is not essential to salvation, or else few of us would be saved. The things that are essential to salvation are so exceedingly simple that no child need sit down in despair of understanding the things which make for his peace. Christ crucified is not a riddle for sages, but a plain truth for plain people: true, it is meat for men, but it is also milk for babes.

Did you say that children could not love? That, after all, is one of the grandest parts of the education of a Christian; did you dream that children could not attain to it? No, you did not say that, nor dared you think it, for the capacity for love is great in a child. Would God it were always as great in ourselves!

To put the thought of the apostle into one or two words: they thought that the children must not come to Christ because they were *not like themselves*—they were not men and women. A child not big enough, tall enough, grown enough, great enough to be blessed by Jesus! So they half thought. The child must not come to the Master because he is not like the man. How the blessed Saviour turns the tables and says, "Say not, the child may not come till he is like a man, but know that *you* cannot come till you are like him. It is no difficulty in the child's way that he is not like you; the difficulty is with you, that you are not like the child." Instead of the child needing to wait until he grows up and becomes a man, it is the man who must grow down and become like a child. "Whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein." Our Lord's words are a complete and all-sufficient answer to the thought of his disciples, and we may each one as we read them learn wisdom. Let us not say, "Would to God my child were grown up like myself that he might come to Christ"; but rather may we almost wish that we were little children again, could forget much that now we know, could be washed clean from habit and prejudice, and could begin again with a child's freshness, simplicity, and eagerness. As we pray for spiritual childhood, Scripture sets its seal upon the prayer, for it is written, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God"; and again, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Thus much, then, upon the secret thought of the disciples.

Now, I wonder whether any of you have such a thought as theirs lingering in your brain or heart this morning. I wonder whether you ever think in this fashion? I should not be surprised if you do. I hope it is not quite so common as it need to be, but I used to see in

certain quarters among old folks a deep suspicion of youthful piety. The seniors shook their heads at the idea of receiving children into the church. Some even ventured to speak of converts as "only a lot of girls and boys": as if they were the worse for that. Many if they hear of a child-convert are very dubious, unless he dies very soon, and then they believe all about him. If the child lives they sharpen their axes to have a cut at him by way of examination. He must know all the doctrines, certainly, and he must be supernaturally grave. It is not every grown-up person who knows the higher doctrines of the Word, but if the young person should not know them he is set aside. Some people expect almost infinite wisdom in a child before they can believe him to be the subject of divine grace. This is monstrous. Then, again, if a believing child should act like a child, some of the fathers of the last generation judged that he could not be converted, as if conversion to Christ added twenty years to our age. Of course, the young convert must not play any more, nor talk in his own childish fashion, or the seniors would be shocked; for it was a sort of understood thing that as soon as ever a child was converted he was to turn into an old man. I never could see anything in Scripture to support this theory, but then Scripture was not so much cared for as the judgment of the deep-experienced people, and the general opinion that it was well to summer and winter all converts before admitting them into the sacred enclosures of the church. Now, if any of you still have an idea in your head hostile to the conversion of children, try and get rid of it, for it is as wrong as wrong can be. If there were two enquirers before me now, a child and a man, and I received from each the same testimony, I should have no more right to distrust the child than to suspect the man: in fact, if suspicions must come in anywhere, it ought rather to be exercised towards the adult than in reference to the child, who is far less likely to be guilty of hypocrisy than the man, and far less likely to have borrowed his words and phrases. At any rate, learn from the Master's words that you are not to try and make the child like yourself, but you are to be transformed till you yourself are like the child.

II. Now we pass to our second head, namely, **THE OPEN DECLARATION OF OUR LORD**, wherein he sets forth his mind upon this matter.

Looking at it carefully, we observe, first, that he tells the disciples that *the gospel sets up a kingdom*. Was there ever a kingdom which had no children in it? How then could it grow? Jesus tells us that children are admitted into the kingdom; nay, not only that some few are here and there admitted into it, but "of such is the kingdom of God." I am not inclined to get away from the plain sense of that expression, nor to suggest that he merely means that the kingdom consists of those who are like children. It is clear that he intended such children as those who were before him—babes and young children: "of such is the kingdom of God." There are children in all kingdoms, and there are children in Christ's kingdom; and I am not certain that John Newton was not right when he said that the majority of persons who are now in the kingdom of God are children. When I think of all the multitudes of babes that have died, who are now swarming in the streets of heaven, it does seem to me to be a blessed thought that albeit generation after generation of adults have passed away in unbelief and rebellion, yet enormous multitudes of children

have gone streaming up to heaven, saved by the grace of God, through the death of Christ, to sing the high praises of the Lord for ever before the eternal throne. "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." They give tone and character to the kingdom ; it is rather a kingdom of children than of men.

Next, our Lord tells us that *the way of entering the kingdom is by receiving*. "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein." We do not enter into the kingdom of God by working out some deep problem and arriving at its solution ; not by fetching something out of ourselves, but by receiving a secret something into us. We come into the kingdom by the kingdom's coming into us : it receives us by our receiving it. Now, if this entrance into the kingdom depended upon something to be fetched out of the human mind by study and deep thought, then very few children could ever enter it ; but it depends upon something to be received, and therefore children may enter. Those children who are of years sufficient to sin and to be saved by faith, have to listen to the gospel and to receive it by faith : and they can do this, God the Holy Spirit helping them. There is no doubt about it, because great numbers have done it. I will not say at what age children are first capable of receiving the knowledge of Christ, but it is much earlier than some fancy ; and we have seen and known children who have given abundant evidence that they have received Christ and have believed in him at a very early age. Some of them have died triumphantly, and others of them have lived graciously, and some are here now, grown up to be men and women, who are honourable members of the church. Oh, sirs, ye who would fain be considered to be "cultured" and thoughtful, and therefore able to fetch a gospel out of the deep well of your own consciousness, you will never be saved by that process. It is not that which cometh out of you which will save you, but that which goeth into you. Inventions and discoveries will not enable you to enter the kingdom ; you must be receivers. You must sit at Jesus' feet and believe what he reveals. You must let your artful questions and your curious suppositions lie still, and you must become a scholar ; for the proud spirit which scorns discipleship will shut you out of the kingdom of God unless you crucify it. We enter the kingdom by receiving, and therefore children can enter.

The next thing in the text is that if we receive this kingdom, and so enter into it, *we must receive it as children receive it*. How do children receive the kingdom of God ? The answer must be twofold, seeing there are two sorts of children—those who are mere babes, and incapable of actual sin, and those who are quite capable both of sinning and believing. I shut out neither from the text, because I honestly think they are both there. In one gospel our version reads *infants*, and in the one before us *little children*. We know that *infants* enter the kingdom, for we are convinced that all of our race who die in infancy are included in the election of grace, and partake in the redemption wrought out by our Lord Jesus. Whatever some may think, we believe that the whole spirit and tone of the word of God, as well the nature of God himself, lead us to believe that all who leave this world as babes are saved. Now, how do they receive the kingdom, for in the same way must we receive it ? Certainly children do not receive it by birth or blood, for we are expressly

told in John's gospel that the children of God are born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh. All privilege of descent is now abolished, and no babe enters into heaven because it was born of a pious father or mother, neither shall any be shut out because his progenitors were atheists or idolaters. My solemn persuasion is that the child of a Mahometan, or a Papist, or a Buddhist, or a cannibal, dying in infancy, is as surely saved as the child of the Christian. Salvation by blood or birth there can be none, for the gospel dispensation does not admit of it: if saved, as we assuredly believe they are, infants must be saved simply according to the will and good pleasure of God, because he hath made them to be his own.

Neither are infants saved as the result of any ceremony. There is no mention in the passage of infant baptism, and yet if there had been such an ordinance this appears to be a natural time for announcing it. Not so much as a word or a hint upon that practice can be found here, and therefore I will not waste words upon a question quite foreign to my text. It is clear that our Lord is speaking of children as such, and not as the subjects of a ceremony. Children dying in infancy in China and Japan are as truly saved as those dying in England or Scotland. Their want of (so-called) baptism cannot affect them one jot. Babes of swarthy mothers, infants born in the kraal of the Hottentot or the wigwam of the Red Indian are alike saved, and therefore not saved by any outward rite, or by the mystic power of a priesthood. They are raised to the kingdom of heaven by the free and sovereign grace of God. How are they saved then?—By works? No, for they have never wrought any. By their natural innocence? No; for if that innocence could have admitted them to heaven, it must also have sufficed to save them from pain and death. If sin be not upon them in some form, how is it that they suffer? The imputed sin which makes them die prevents our believing that they claim heaven by right of innocence. They die because of Adam's fall. Sad consequence of their being born of fallen parents. Mark their appealing looks as the dear little ones look up in their sufferings, as if they would fain ask why they must endure so much pain. We look at them with all the deeper grief because we cannot help them, and are made to reflect upon the mysterious union of the race in its fall and sorrow. The anguish of the dying little one is a proof of Adam's fall, and of its participation in the result thereof. The dear babes live again, however, because Jesus died and rose again, and they are in him. They perish, as far as this life is concerned, for a sin which they did not commit; but they also live eternally through a righteousness in which they had no hand, even the righteousness of Jesus Christ, who hath redeemed them. We know little of the matter, but we suppose them to undergo regeneration ere they enter heaven: for that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and to enter the spiritual world they must be born of the Spirit. But whatever is wrought in them, it is clear that they do not enter the kingdom by the force of intellect, or will, or merit, but as a matter of free grace, having no reference to anything that they have done or have felt. In that same manner you, O man, must pass into the kingdom, entirely through free grace, and not at all by any power or merit of your own. You will enter heaven as fully by grace as if you had never lived a godly life, nor had practised a single virtue. I said the other evening

to an esteemed member of this church, who lies dying, "Dear brother, you have been a good soldier of Jesus Christ." He replied, "You say so, but I think nothing of what I have done. I am looking to Christ alone." Just so. That is the ground of salvation. There cannot be any reason for the salvation of that dear babe, which has just passed the portals of the skies, for it was born of a fallen race, except the grace of God; and that grace of God which saves the babe must save you and me. I have nothing else to rest upon but the babe's Saviour, and no hope except the belief that the headship of Christ comprehends me within itself, even as it comprehends the little one.

Now we have to think of another sort of children, those who outlive the time of infancy and become children capable of actual sin, and of knowing Christ, and being converted. Many of these by faith enter the kingdom. Now, as these children receive the kingdom of heaven, so must we receive it. How do the children receive it? I answer, a child receives the gospel with humility, with simple faith, and with unworldliness. Children are not held up to us as an example in all things, for they have faults which we ought to avoid, but they are here praised in this point,—the way in which they receive the kingdom. How does a child receive it? We have said first *with humility*. He is humble enough to be without prejudice. Take a little child and tell him about Christ Jesus the Saviour, and if God blesses the telling of the story of the cross, and he believes it, he receives it without having any wrong views and notions to battle with. Many a man goes to hear the gospel with the idea that Christ is merely human; he cannot get rid of that prejudice from his mind, and therefore he does not receive Christ Jesus the Lord. Another comes to hear the word with the recollection of all that he has heard and read of infidelity, heresy, and profanity: how can he profit till this is removed? Another comes with his mind stuffed with proud self-righteousness, with a belief in priestcraft, or with a reliance upon some form or ceremony. If we could get this lumber out of the soul, there would be some hope; but all this is a hindrance. Now, the dear child, as he listens to the story of the love of God in Christ Jesus, has none of these prejudices to spoil his hearing. Very likely he does not even know that such evils have been invented by man, and he is blessed in his ignorance. He will find out the evil soon enough; but for the present he humbly drinks in the word, and prays,—

"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look on me, a little child;
Pity my simplicity;
Suffer me to come to thee."

Now, this deliverance from preconceived notions is what we greatly need. My highly cultured and learned hearer over yonder, you must come to Jesus as if you knew nothing, to begin *de novo*, with a clean page, on which Jesus must write what you are to believe. Just as your little boy or your little girl must believe, even so must you. There is only one way for the shepherd and the sage, the philosopher and the peasant. The little child receives Christ humbly, for he never dreams of merit or purchase. I do not recollect ever having met with a child who had to battle with self-righteousness in coming to Christ. A child cannot say,

"Lord, I have been a constant attendant at church or at the meeting-house for years. I have taken the sacrament regularly for half-a-century," neither can he say with the Pharisee, "I fast twice in the week. I give tithes of all that I possess." Now, when a little one believes in the Lord Jesus, it is always with a heart clear of boasting, and with a soul which sings,

"In my hand no price I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling."

That is how you will have to come to Jesus, my fine fellow. You must doff those feathers of pride, and strip off that finery of self-righteousness or you will find heaven's gate too low and too narrow for you.

A little child is free from the pride of knowledge; it has no "culture" and research to heap up before the cross. Certain men will not come to Jesus because they know too much; their self-conceit will be their ruin. They have read, and they have thought, and they have studied, and therefore they know better than inspiration, better than apostles and prophets. But my big brother, you must be diminished and brought down from the chair of the critic to the stool of the scholar if ever you are saved. Saving truth *enters* the heart; it is not developed from within; and it will have to come into you as it comes into the child, simply by believing what Jesus says, or else you will be a castaway. There is no other way of your entering into the kingdom of God but by the door which admits a child.

A second point about a little child is that it is generally *teachable*. You do not find your children in the Sunday school, when the Lord blesses them, raising difficulties: they do not enquire how is the good news from heaven consistent with reason? and how is this statement of Scripture to be reconciled with the spirit of the age? No, there is the bread of heaven before the child, and he eats it, though he does not yet know how the wheat was made into bread. That is how we must receive the kingdom: we must lay aside all hope of solving difficulties, and believe upon the authority of God. Nothing short of this is faith.

Children receive the gospel without proposing amendments in it. "I should like your gospel," saith one, "if you would alter it here, and amend it there." There is a clique abroad nowadays who are always for unsettling our faith in the old truth; but a child receiving the gospel knows nothing of such designs; he takes it from the word of God just as he sees it there. In the same manner must we receive the kingdom of heaven.

A child receives it, too, with a wondering realization of it. When you tell a believing child the promises of the word of God, how he opens his little eyes, how fully he believes the word, how ready he is to ask for the blessing, and to receive it, and act upon it. It is to him a matter of undoubted fact. I have even seen people who profess to be Christians smiling at the matter-of-fact way in which a child has believed the word of God; and yet we ought to believe it in the same way, and we shall never enter into the enjoyment of it till we do. In the child's simple, honest, hearty way we must believe the word to mean what it says, and to be a reality and a truth, and then shall we know the marrow and fatness of the gospel.

Once again, the child receives the gospel, and in an *unworldly* manner. He has not to think of how he shall meet those heavy bills to-morrow, nor even of how he shall provide for his daily bread : he has not much to think of at all except that which he is taught. It is a grand thing to give all one's mind to the teaching of Jesus, for then we are sure to learn. It is beautiful to see how contented children are. A child of a poor man is just as happy as a young prince : with a few bits of platter to play with he is just as much at his ease as if he could handle diamonds and rubies. The child has no ambition for great things. What can boys and girls care for stars and garters ? They are satisfied with their lot, they crave not for thrones and kingdoms. Give them enough dirt to make a pie, and they will be as merry as the birds in spring, and much more satisfied than a millionaire if he could obtain sole possession of the Bank of England. In this respect children have an advantage over us, because when they receive the kingdom of God they are not full already with the thoughts of the world and the cares of riches. If you notice, our Saviour has placed this incident just before that of the rich young man who went away sorrowful ; as much as if he would set before us the man with his possessions who loses the kingdom in contrast with the child with none, and thinking about none, who receives the kingdom. Oh that you who are unsaved would let your business alone awhile and give your whole minds to seeking Christ. He is your main need. Oh that you would forget your worldly concerns a little, and go into your chamber and cry, "Great God, I will seek after nothing else but thee until I find thee. I must have Christ or die. Lord, I cast all else aside, and resolve to wait upon thee till I am washed from sin and admitted into thy kingdom."

Now, I think I hear some one murmur, "If this be true, where is the use of the exercise of private judgment?" The highest result of the exercise of judgment is that upon a calm survey you resolve to sit at Jesus' feet. You do not resign yourself to any pope, preacher, or human leader ; but since Jesus is God you feel quite safe in accepting his infallible word as your guide, and, like a child, you sit at his feet.

Well, saith another, but where is the use of our obtaining learning and knowledge ? Here is one of the uses of it ; for it is not your learned man who rejects Christ, it is your man who has a smattering of learning and boasts of it : he that hath an honest heart and is deeply learned always feels it sweet to be a child in the presence of his God. The most gigantic minds in the world are the most childlike. Learn as much as ever you can, and investigate as far as ever you please ; but if God sanctifies your learning it will help to make you more childlike, so that you will all the more readily learn of Jesus.

"But then, where is the use of experience?" This is the best use of experience. What little I have ever had of experience has taught me that I cannot trust myself at all ; that I can neither think a good thought nor do a right act apart from my Master. My experience teaches me to be sure of nothing, except I have it from my Lord's mouth ; and I think the more experience any man obtains the more will he be of that mind. "Still," says one, "surely, we must advance in capacity, and in attainments, and become men?" I admit that very freely ; but when in knowledge you are men, then in teachableness you

will be quite sure to be children; for the greater a man becomes in the kingdom of God, the more a child he becomes: yea, the greatest among us, who sat as high above us as the heavens are above the earth, is one who was called "The Holy Child Jesus." When we see him sitting in the midst of children, who cluster all round him while he clasps one and another to his bosom, we perceive that he is wonderfully much at home; just a holy, tender, lovely man-child himself, loving and being loved. Let us try to be such. Do you not all love a man who is childlike in the frankness and loveableness of his nature? Do you not all wish that you could grow into children in simplicity, and live a child's life in freedom from care? That is the use of increased capacity, that you may be more capable of being children, that you may have more capacity to receive the truth from God, because you are more conscious of your ignorance and emptiness. He is the best receiver who feels himself to be thoroughly empty, and is at the same time as willing to be taught as a little child.

III. My time has gone before I noticed it, and I must only say two or three words upon the last head, namely, THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT given by our Lord in the text. I cannot expatiate, but I pray you consider it each one for himself.

First, to all parents and teachers. Let us rejoice in the conviction that our children may be brought to Christ, and let us labour earnestly to bring them, however little they may be. I hope we prayed about them while they yet knew nothing of our prayers, and I hope we shall continue to pray for them till we see them safe in the arms of Jesus.

Next, what an encouragement this is to children. I am always glad to see the little ones so desirous to come to the Tabernacle service. I hope they can understand a good deal of what is said; ay, I am sure they do, for I see their beaming faces. Dear little children, come to Jesus. Do not wait till you grow up; but seek the Lord early, for his promise is, "They that seek me early shall find me."

And then what encouragement this is to all who are childlike. You feel that you do not know much, you mourn your want of capacity for grasping the lofty truths of the Word, you feel willing to be anything or nothing so that you may but be saved: surely the reception of the children will encourage you in the belief that Jesus will accept you.

And last of all, to my mind it is a sweet comfort concerning our race, over which we have such cause to mourn. After all, when we think of infants being saved, and of the Lord saying, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven," we shall hope that out of all kindreds, and nations, and tongues there will be a number that no man can number, in whom Christ shall see of the travail of his soul. Millions of infant souls compose the family above. If you have lost infants you will rejoice when you remember that you will go to them though they will not return to you.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Luke xviii. 1—34.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—784, 507, 704.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE GREAT EMANCIPATOR.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn : and I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me."—Exodus iv. 22, 23.

"Then the Lord said unto Moses, Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh."—Exodus vi. 1.

GOD had a people in Egypt. They were his own, the people of his choice. Although they had been grievously oppressed, and had sunk into ignominious slavery, his interest in their welfare had in no degree lessened. The Lord's purpose in sending Moses down into Egypt was that he might fetch out that people from among the nations to make them a separate people to himself, that he might give them an inheritance, even the land which flowed with milk and honey, and that they might dwell there as witnesses of his covenant and keep his testimonies. Now precisely what God was doing towards his people Israel in the land of Ham he is doing towards his own chosen ones throughout the whole world. From one point of view the object of the gospel is to gather out from amongst the nations a people whom he did foreknow, whom he did predestinate, whom he hath redeemed unto himself to be his peculiar heritage. These are to be fetched out from amongst others ; to be made a separated people ; to be brought into a distinct position, and to have a distinct experience. "The people shall dwell alone ; they shall not be reckoned amongst the nations ;" and they are ultimately to be brought to a prepared place, for which they are to be specially prepared that they may abide there, and that the Lord may verify the thing that he has predicted of them, "They shall be mine in that day when I make up my jewels." The work of rescuing perishing sinners out of the present evil world is as worthy of God as the work of delivering Israel out of Egypt. The same right hand of Jehovah, glorious in power, which released the sons of Jacob from the thralldom of Pharaoh, is now stretched out to ransom us from the dominion of Satan. The song of praise to Jesus Christ our Redeemer shall be more exultant than that

which Miriam and the daughters of Israel lifted up by the Red Sea when they said, "Come let us sing unto the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously." Indeed, we shall sing at last the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, clearly indicating that the redemption out of Egypt was always meant to be a leading type of the redemption of God's people from out of the midst of the world, for Christ has a people whom he hath redeemed from among men, and there is a church of which it is written, "Christ loved his church and gave himself for it."

Now, in the process of bringing out these people of God from amongst the mass of mankind God sometimes uses instrumentality, just as he did in the former case. He may employ an instrument that is apparently as little adapted for the work as Moses felt himself to be. Yet the work is done, and to God belongs the honour of accomplishing it. As for those of us whom he uses, we are more than content to yield the honour to him. We rejoice in his excellency while we feel that we cannot take to ourselves any credit whatever; for we are less than nothing in his sight, and even in our own sight we are weak and worthless, so that unto God alone shall the glory redound when redemption's work is finished and complete.

I invite you to think, first of all, upon the *voice of God*. According to our text, it is, "Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: and I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me." When we have dilated a little upon that, we shall want to have a few words upon the *voice of man*. This was to be the voice of man, "*Thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord.*" What God had spoken was to be repeated by his servant Moses. Then we shall close by noticing, in the third place, the *power of God which was to go with this voice of man*. "I will be with thy mouth, and thou shalt see what I will do unto Pharaoh."

I. Let us endeavour, then, at the outset, to fix our thoughts upon THE VOICE OF GOD, which was a real power to bring up his people out of Egypt.

That voice was threefold; asserting his proprietorship in them, demanding their freedom, and ordaining their destiny. *With imperial authority he claims the people as his own*. "Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn." The Lord knoweth them that are his, and the Lord avouched them to be his own with a jealousy of his inalienable right to their allegiance, and an assertion of his unfailing interest in their welfare. The children of Israel were at that time in a very sordid condition. They were up to their necks in clay, making bricks. They were a band of slaves, degraded, brought down to the lowest condition. They were so spiritless that they submitted to any exaction of the tyrant; and when the day of deliverance dawned on them they could not think emancipation possible, or welcome the joyful change in their prospects. They had, as a nation, lost the very thought of liberty. It was trodden out. The people seemed as if they must lose their nationality, or only retain it as a nation of slaves. Yet all begrimed and beslaved as they came to be, they were still beloved. The Lord owned them. He said, "Israel is my son, even my firstborn." Surely Pharaoh might have said in his heart, "This is a fine son!"

What must the God be who says of these brickmakers, this abject race, 'This is my son?' Yes, and these ill-conditioned, unkempt serfs, these debased men and women, he says of them—"Even my firstborn, my son and heir." A man is naturally proud of his son and heir, yet there is the mighty God speaking after the language of mortal men, acknowledging those cheerless, crestfallen, despised, and dispirited people and saying, "Israel is my son, even my firstborn"; acknowledging them, too, in the teeth of proud Pharaoh, whose firstborn was saluted as a prince of the blood royal when he rode through the land, before whom every knee bowed, and to whom as the son of the great king homage was constantly rendered. "Israel is my son," saith God, "even my firstborn." He is not ashamed of his people. He owns his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sin, just as he loved his people Israel when they were still in bondage and in degradation. "He loved my soul out of the pit," said one of old. He loved us when we were lying in our blood, like an infant cast out unwaddled and unwashed. When no eye pitied us in the day of our nativity, and we were cast out in the open field he passed by, and it was a time of love, and he said unto us, "Live." Oh, wondrous grace of God, that he owns his son when that son is still an Egyptian slave.

Moreover, God owned his people when they did not own him, for his name "Jehovah" was scarcely known to them. Although Moses presented himself to them with evident credentials, they were ready enough to reject him. They had gone aside unto false gods, we are informed in other parts of the Scripture. During their sojourn in Egypt the Israelites fell into the prevailing superstition of the country, and they forsook the Lord. Some little light still lingered among them. Some traditions were treasured and transmitted from sire to son in solemn trust. Doubtless there was a remnant of pious souls, faithful to the God of Abraham. The bones of Joseph, preserved in Goshen as a memorial of the oath that he took of their tribes, subsequently carried through all their devious wanderings in the wilderness, and ultimately buried in Shechem, as you read in the last chapter of the book of Joshua, vouch for a fidelity we cannot wantonly forget. But the bulk of the people had fallen into the snares which surrounded them, and conformed to the fashions of those among whom their fortunes were cast, whose gods many and lords many were superstitiously served in secret. They were not a people who could have scraped together so much as a molehill of merit, if they had tried. They were a vain and vicious people, prone to supplant, yet utterly supplanted; specially sinful, because their marked proclivities which might have developed on the side of virtue were perverted into stains and stigmas on their reputation. Yet Jehovah says, "Israel is my son, even my firstborn." And does the Lord own his people when they know not him? Ah, blessed be his name, he does, or else they would never come to know him. We love him now, because he first loved us; and if there had not been that antecedent knowledge of us, and love towards us, we had not now been what we now are. Oh, the freeness and spontaneity of the grace of God, that he should know his people, and call them his own, even when as yet they know him not.

He owns this people, by owning his covenant. "Israel is my son." He was referring to the covenant, which he had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob of old. And the Lord knows his people, and shows favour to them, not because of anything personal to recommend them; for there is no superiority in their nature, no brightness in their intellect, no beauty in their disposition that can be pleasing in his sight. The sole title to grace in his eyes is that ancient covenant ordered in all things and sure which he has made, not with Abraham, but with our Lord Jesus, who stands as our covenant head. We do not sufficiently reflect upon the covenant as the great deep that lieth under the fountain of many waters out of which all the wells of salvation continue to be filled with the living waters of grace.

"Ne'er hadst thou felt the guilt of sin,
Or sweets of pardoning love,
Unless thy worthless name had been
Enrolled to life above."

Unless thou hadst an interest in that covenant, which he made in the eternal council chamber long ere the earth was most assuredly in hapless, hopeless, obscurity, thou wouldest have lived and died. This was the reason why he called Israel his son. An ancient covenant had made Israel to be so regarded. How sweet it is that he does not merely speak about the people as being his *people*, but he says, "Israel is my son." There is a love between father and son, which cannot be found elsewhere. Blood is thicker than water. Relationship has ties that cannot be relaxed. "Ay, but," says one, "Does God ever call his people in any place his sons before they are regenerate?" Well, there is a text that says, "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of his Son into your hearts, whereby ye cry, Abba, Father." It is because in the purpose of God his people are really his sons before they know anything at all about it, that in due time he sends the spirit of his Son to give them the nature of children that they may enjoy the adoption of children and say, "Abba, Father." O beloved, it is delightful to think that the Lord should look upon us before we are born—before we are born again—with a love that cannot be measured and cannot be broken.

The gist of this owning was thus: "Israel is my son. You, Pharaoh, may call him your slave, but he is my child. He was mine before he was yours. Israel is my son. You say, 'No, he is my serf.' I say, though he has fallen under your yoke, I will maintain my right to him as my firstborn. He is a prince, and to that estate he shall be raised." The Lord has a claim upon his people—a claim which all the claims of law and all the clamours of sin and death and hell shall never be able to gainsay; and though they basely submit to the claims of the wicked one, and make a covenant with death, and a league with hell, yet shall Jehovah's claim upon them stand, for thus saith the Lord, "Your league with death is broken, and your covenant with hell is disannulled." The Lord Jesus will not suffer those whom he has made to be his own people, and ransomed by the bloody purchase upon the tree, to remain the slaves of sin and Satan. They are his. His

Father gave them to him. They are his ; he bought them. They are his ; their names are written on his hands and graven on his side. They are his ; he will not suffer so much as one of them to remain in bondage to the adversary. By thus owning his people he puts in a positive claim, which puts all other claims on one side.

With the bare assertion of absolute right *he demands their unconditional freedom*. "Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my first-born : and I say unto thee, let my son go." What a grand verse that is ! What an imperial edict it contains ! As in the narrative of the Cosmos, God said, "Light be, and light was" ; so in the history of the exodus short words are launched with sovereign force—"Let my son go." Well might the proud heart of Pharaoh have quailed before the Almighty, whose lip asserted a right which his arm was able instantly to enforce. How aptly those tones apply to our deliverance from under the law. The law includes all mankind under its curse, the God of this world claims the whole human race as his subjects. In due time our Redeemer appears. The Lord Jesus comes, identifies himself with the enslaved family, bears the curse, fulfils the law, and then on the ground of simple justice demands for them full and perfect liberty, having for them fulfilled the precept, and for them endured the penalty. "*Let my son go.*" On what pretext could the law, unless it were lawless and unjust, put in a claim which has been discharged, or urge a right which has already been fulfilled. No, from under the law the people of God go free, and their joy is that they are not under the law henceforth, but under grace. And how gloriously do those tones sound when they come with force and power to rescue us from the tyranny of sin and Satan. The prince of the power of the air holds men in subjection, he prejudices them, and so stops their ears against the gospel, he seals their eyes against the eternal light, but thus saith the Lord, "Let my son go," and immediately the prejudice vanishes, the ear is opened, eternal truth shines into the heart, scales drop from the eyes, and the soul beholds the heaven-born light, and begins to rejoice. Satan will tie a soul down sometimes in very heavy bondage. I have known him fasten a soul down with steel chains of despair, such as could not be snapped. The man has said "There is no hope," and he has given up all thought of pardon and eternal life, but "thus saith the Lord, let my son go." The iron bands have snapped in a moment, and the man has risen to hope and liberty, for the Lord's voice breaketh the fetter. Fast bound by fearful habits, which it seemed impossible to give up, having plunged into one sin after another, the man has been shut in by one iron gate and then by another and another, and was enclosed in the innermost ward of the prison. But at midnight he has been smitten on the side when he was asleep in his senseless carelessness. Around him has shone a great light : the covenant angel has come to him and led him through gate after gate, the iron gates have opened of their own accord, and the man has found himself free, and scarcely knew whether it was true or not. He wist not that it was true, but thought he saw a vision. The thing has been scarcely done ere he has found himself to be alive, and delivered from the bonds of sin, filled with astonishment at himself, and saying, "How can this be ?" His tongue has been filled with singing, and his mouth with laughter, and

he has said, "The Lord has done great things for me, whereof I am glad."

Well, beloved, the tones of that august voice which said "Let my son go" will continue to echo as long as you and I are here below. We shall continue to be let go. This glorious liberty shall be daily made more manifest to us. Are we not as creatures made subject to vanity, and compassed with infirmity? By-and-by we shall be liberated from the bondage of the flesh; our bodies shall go down into the grave, and there lie for awhile in the prison-house of the tomb; but that voice which quickened us into spiritual life will resuscitate our bodies, and cause them to enter into the resurrection-life of Christ. Through the dark, dismal vaults will sound the loud, cheerful voice "Let my son go," and there shall not a bone of a believer be left. As it was said of old, "not a hoof shall be left behind," so nothing that belongs to redeemed man shall be left either in hades or in the grave. "Of all that thou has given me I have lost nothing," saith Christ, and truly, of persons and of things—of all the people and of all that shall belong to the people to make up their manhood—there shall nothing be lost, but the Lord shall have his own, and his grace shall triumph.

This voice of God is an owning of his people, and a claim for their deliverance: but no less is it an *ordaining of their destiny*. "Let my son go, that he may serve me." Oh yea, beloved, we are no sooner set free from serving Pharaoh than we begin to serve Jehovah. "Let my son go, that he may serve me."

And in what capacity did Israel serve God? It was in the loftiest capacity possible. Israel became henceforth Jehovah's priest. It was in Israel that the sacrifice was offered. In Israel the incense was burnt. From Israel went up the sacred psalm. Israel stood before the Lord in that high position of sacred privilege. So likewise is it that as soon as a man is brought out of the bondage of sin, he presents unto the Lord the sacrifice of Christ by faith, and afterwards goes on to present himself a living sacrifice. Thus his thanksgivings, and his broken and contrite heart, are perpetual oblations and offerings of a sweet smelling savour, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Israel became the servant of God by way of preserving the testimony. His were the oracles. Israel kept the knowledge of the one God. Israel kept the revelation of the Most High. While all the world without was dark, Israel preserved the light. To this end, in like manner, brethren, you and I are called of God. If he has brought us up out of the Egypt of sin, we are to present daily sacrifice, we are to bear daily testimony to the truth. And oh, if we do not, should we begin to stagger through unbelief, or speak with bated breath of the truth that has been surely made known to us; should the fear of man, or the fashion of the age so beguile our hearts, becloud our eyes, belie our good profession, and utterly befool our common sense that we shall blush to bear our testimony—what shame must cover us; what confusion must take hold upon us. But, blessed be his name, he will keep his own true to his word. If it were possible, the free-thinkers and the false teachers, in these days, would deceive the very elect, but that is out of the question; it is beyond the range of possibility. All thy

children shall be taught of the Lord ; and they shall hold his truth, and bear witness to it, even to the world's end.

Israel was to be God's servant henceforth, to serve him by walking by faith. What a wonderful forty years' walk that was in the wilderness. They did not live up to it ; still the spirit of that march of mystery was very wonderful. Without sowing or reaping they were fed ; supplied with water without fountain, reservoir, or watercourse ; guided without a compass, and without one sign of trackway, over a shifting sand. Yet they were always well fed, well housed, and, what was still more marvellous, their camps were well shaded by day, and well lit by night. They had a choice experience of having nothing and yet possessing everything. With no fertile fields or fruitful trees, yet Israel was made to live upon the fat of the kidneys of wheat, and to ride upon the high places of the earth. She had all things and she abounded. The Lord was her shepherd, and she did not want.

We are often called upon to serve God, and that very conspicuously, though we may be little conscious of it when we are required to walk by faith. This is the work of God, the grandest work a man can do—to believe on him whom he hath sent. The godlike work, the work of works is this, to walk by faith, living upon the unseen God.

Israel was to be God's servant by continually dwelling in happy fellowship with God, and waiting upon him with holy worship. Nowhere else, in all the world, was a passover or a feast of tabernacles kept to do him homage, and nowhere else was this Sabbath hallowed and observed. With them alone Jehovah dwelt, and among them Jehovah shone forth. And so, beloved, if you and I have been called out of bondage, it is that we may serve the Lord. Are we all alive to our obligation ? Are we faithful to our high calling ? Are we doing our bounden, sacred duty ? If anyone here is rescued this night from the grip of the destroyer, delivered from the bondage of this evil world, saved from the damning power of sin, know that when you leave one corps, you must enlist into another corps ; you come in fresh from the enemy's camp, not to be treated as a prisoner, but as a recruit. You must enlist to assail the powers and passions you once defended. God would have you become his servant that you may serve him with joy and gladness all your days.

Thus, then, I have opened up the voice of God ; as far as my time or strength or knowledge has permitted.

II. Now, secondly, here was THE VOICE OF MAN. What a come-down it seems to be. "*Thou* shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Let my son go." Why did not the Lord say it himself ? Why did he need to pick up a Moses and send him to say it ? Well, dear friends, had the Lord said it himself to Pharaoh, it would have been very startling, and Pharaoh must have yielded ultimately to the divine fiat : but do you not see the deeper marvel in the milder proceeding, when Jehovah, as it were, hides his power and cloaks it in weakness ? Instead of appealing to Pharaoh with that voice which breaks the cedars of Lebanon, and makes the hinds to calve, he speaks to him by one who was slow of speech and of a stammering tongue.

Now, if God's voice can vanquish Pharaoh when it masks itself behind the feebleness of a stuttering, stammering Moses, it will be

more glorious than it would have been if it had used no instrumentality whatever. Why does not the Lord speak to every sinner directly, and bring him out and save him? Well: he might do so. He might do it if he would; but when he condescends instead thereof to take us poor mortals, who have tasted of his love, and say to us, "Now you go and be my voice: you go and speak for me," oh, then his grace and power are not less conspicuous, but they are far more admirable! In using such ill-adapted tools for the accomplishment of his great designs he shows his own transcendent power. That famous well-cover at Antwerp, just opposite the cathedral—one of the finest pieces of wrought iron that was ever known—is said to have been made by Quintyn Matsys with nothing but a hammer and a file, his fellow workmen having taken away his tools. If it be so, the more praise is due to his consummate skill. All the works of God redound to his glory: but when the tools he uses appear to be totally inadequate to the results he achieves our reverence is excited, while our reason is abashed, and we marvel at a power we cannot understand. This comes home to some of us very closely. Let us put it to ourselves. Does the Lord take thee, my brother, or has he taken me; and does he speak words of eternal power through our poor little tongues—through these unruly members, that are prone to do so much mischief? If he really wins souls through them, or pulls down the pride of Pharaoh through them, then shall it ring through eternity that the Lord hath done marvellous things. He hath taken the worm and made him to be a sharp thrashing instrument, having teeth, and made him to thrash the mountains. He hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hath he ordained strength, because of his enemies, that he might still the enemy and the avenger. Unto his name be glory for ever and ever.

The feebleness of the human voice has never appeared more palpably than when it has attempted to repeat the sentences which have been uttered by the mouth of the Lord. Moses seems to think that there must be some mistake. Can it be that God means to bring Israel out of Egypt by him? Whenever God designs to make his servants eminently useful, he lets them know their frailty. The more treasure there is in the vessel, the less will its comeliness be vaunted. It is more common ware, an earthen vessel; that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. But when Moses found that he really was employed of God, how fearless he was of ridicule. He went in unto Pharaoh and delivered his Master's message. The interview with Moses and Aaron must have seemed supremely ridiculous to Pharaoh. It put him into a great rage. These two Israelites, wretched slaves, coming to tell the great king of Egypt that he must let Israel go. How absurd! Even to the Israelites it must have appeared preposterous, for two persons such as these to go in before the king. Why, with a word he could have said, "Take off the dogs' heads," and so have ended all the business directly. Yet they went and bearded him in his royal palace, and delivered what he might think a vain menace, but what they knew to be a veritable message from God,

Insignificant as we of ourselves may be, the very fact that God instructs us to speak might suffice to quell our fears. We must go and speak the Lord's message, and must not be afraid of being thought infatuated. When I have sometimes bidden a sinner live and believe in Christ, I have heard a mutter, "What is the good of telling a dead man to live?" Some wise brother has said, "You might as well shake a pocket-handkerchief over a grave." Yes, brother, it is true—quite true. So might Moses as well have shaken a pocket-handkerchief outside Pharaoh's palace; but, when God bade him to go and tell Pharaoh to let his people go, he went and did it. And when the Lord bids any one of us go to a sinner and say, "Believe," we cannot make the sinner believe, neither can he make himself believe: but the preacher sent of God is an echo of God's voice; God speaks through him; with authority he is commissioned to say to the sinner, "Turn ye, turn ye; why will ye die? Repent and be baptized every one of you." We are bidden to speak peremptorily, as ambassadors of the King; not because of any prerogative we assume, but as we commend ourselves to every man's conscience, there is power in our message. The voice that speaks by stammering Moses is divine, notwithstanding the ridicule that may be heaped upon it.

Moses having such a command to go and speak must be undeterred by refusal. "I know not the Lord," said Pharaoh, "neither will I let his people go." Now, dear brother, you cannot win souls unless you are prepared to meet with strong rebuffs. Ay, but some are heart-broken if any resistance is offered them. You may expect it. Old human nature does not know the Lord. You recollect how Melancthon thought he was going to convert any number of people when he began to preach, but when he found out his mistake he said, "Old Adam is too strong for young Melancthon." So he is. You will come across a bit of grit every now and then which will break your knife. Be not dismayed, the Lord will sharpen you and make you stronger and stronger yet; for even that Pharaoh, who said, "I will not let the people go," will be down on his knees presently begging the people to depart. We must be prepared for opposition, and neither flinch nor quail, but brace ourselves up for the struggle.

So, too, the man whom God sends ought to be assured of success. I am persuaded that Moses, after he had got over his first little difficulties with the people and recovered from his own diffidence, parleyed not with doubt, but was strong in faith. There he stood with the wondrous rod, turning waters into blood and slaying all their fish, covering the heavens with blackness, turning the dust into living creatures, bringing hail and grievous murrain, and doing it all as calmly and quietly as he should do who feels that he is the voice of God. How steadily he kept at his work! With what diligence he persevered in it, till at last the tenth plague found Moses unmoved, ready to conduct the people away to the Red Sea and to bring them out into the wilderness! O servants of God, be calm and confident. Go on preaching the gospel. Go on teaching in the Sunday-school. Go on giving away the tracts. Go on with steady perseverance. Be ye sure of this, ye shall not labour in vain or spend your strength for nought. Do you still stutter? Are you still slow of speech? Nevertheless, go on. Have

you been rebuked and rebuffed? Have you had little else than defeat? This is the way to success. You shall macadamize the road with the rough flints of your failure. Toil on and believe on. Be steadfast in your confidence, for with a high hand and an outstretched arm the Lord will fetch out his own elect, and he will fetch some of them out by you. Only trust in the Lord and hold on the even tenor of your way.

III. Our last word is upon THE POWER OF GOD. Without the power of God the voice of man would have been an utter failure.

What effect was produced by the voice of Moses? Went there not forth with it a power which plagued Pharaoh? It filled the sinful land of Egypt with plagues. So men that preach God's gospel with God's power fill the world with plagues. "I know that," a man says. "I wish I had never listened to that fellow. I could not sleep last night." No, the frogs had got up into his bedchamber. The true preacher finds his hearer sometimes saying, "I will never go again. Wherever I am, I seem to be haunted and tormented with the truth that man has spoken so baldly and so boldly. The commands he enforces run counter to the prejudices I cherish, they alarm my conscience, and worry me incessantly." Yes, he has made a simple sermon bring forth all manner of flies—thoughts that will sting a man wherever he goes, and he cannot escape from them! He still kicks and strives against the gospel—rebels against it, won't have it—gets angry, goes to the theatre one night, joins in a little social revelry another night, but to no purpose; he does not enjoy anything, he scarcely knows why. Anon, a thick darkness comes over the whole scene of life, as the darkness came over all the land of Egypt. All that was beautiful and brilliant is now obscured. All that was pleasant and joyous is now eclipsed. The man finds that he does not even enjoy the ordinary comforts of life. He does not know why. He does not intend to yield to the gospel, yet his very bread seems sour, and the water he draws from the well is brackish and bitter. His troubles multiply and follow one another in quick succession. Now a hail-storm that leaves desolation behind; then a grievous murrain among the cattle. The hand of the Lord is not confined to the farm-stead. It will visit your home. His terrible judgment reaches your family, your fondest love, your first-born son. As of old, there was a cry going up in the land of Egypt, so that it was intolerable to stay there, so God lays bare his arm in the exceeding great plagues which his terrible law brings upon a man. When he means to fetch him out and bring him to himself, God's servants become the harbingers of plagues. Jesus himself said, "I came not to send peace on the earth, but a sword." That sword is unsheathed, and families are divided against each other, with the grand intent that Israel should be brought out and peace established by the redemption which Jehovah has provided.

What will occur by-and-by? Why, the oppressor will be glad to part with his bondmen. It sometimes happens that the ungodly become themselves very glad to get rid of God's chosen people, whom they are prone to persecute. "Their melancholy ill comports with our liveliness," so they say. They did all they could to invite them to their parties and get them into their frivolities again; they laid traps for them to keep them away from hearing the gospel; but now the Lord has begun to deal with them their old companions say, "Now we must give them up." "I have tried all I could to get our old comrade back to our old convivialities," says one, "but, really, he said such things that he quite poisoned all our pleasures. We could not enjoy ourselves, I say, let us get rid of him. Do not let him be in our company any more." Yes, it is a grand thing—when the preaching of the gospel makes the ungodly want to keep the converts away from their cliques—when they say, "Oh, go off to the Tabernacle: we do not want you here; you have pestered us enough with your religion, and your prayers, and your crying, and your tears, and your talk about being lost, and your wanting to find a Saviour. You are bad company, and you had better be gone." A lady who joined this church some years ago, moving in the higher circles of society, said to me, "I was quite willing to continue my acquaintance with my friends, but I found they gave me the cold shoulder, and did not want me." Just so. It is a great mercy when the Egyptians say, "Get ye gone," and when they are ready to give you jewels of silver and jewels of gold to get rid of you. The Lord wants his people to come right out and to be separate; he knows how by the simple utterance of the gospel to put such a division between his people, and those who are not his people, that even the ungodly shall begin to say, "Get you gone; we want to have nothing further to do with you." Glory be to God when such a thing as that happens.

And the Lord knows how to make all opposition cease, for it is written that when Israel came out of Egypt, against the children of Israel did not so much as a dog move his tongue. Before, they were such slaves that if a cur barked at them they dared not turn against it, for fear it should be the dog of an Egyptian, who would be surely down upon them for meddling with his dog. How dare a slave do that? Everybody was against them. But when the Lord brought them out, there was not a dog that dared bark that night. The Egyptians were all anxious that they should be gone, and willing that they should go; and Pharaoh, too, must have astonished his subjects with his sudden zeal to see this strange people gone.

Do you know what that means? Oh, what fightings and fencings, what wars and strifes there were in my soul when I was trying to find Christ! My old sins came up against me, my memory unearthed buried

trespasses; faults and failings gathered in force like a flood, and threatened to overwhelm me. Everything, in my constant studies, and in my daily experiences, seemed to drive me back from Christ. But on that memorable Sabbath morning when I heard the word, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth," I did look, and lo, against me not a dog did move his tongue. My sins did not complain. They were drowned in the Red Sea of Jesus's blood. My old corruptions,—I did not know at the time that I had any, they were so very quiet. Temptations ceased to trouble me. For that little while, at any rate, the warrior seemed to sheathe his sword and the brickmaker laid down his clay to go out of Egypt with jewels of silver and jewels of gold. I could sing unto the Lord, for he had triumphed gloriously. I have met some of these old Egyptians since then, a good number of them, and I have had some hard dealings with them; but, at that time, all was still and quiet, happy and blessed.

"Happy day, happy day,
When Jesus washed my sins away."

With the paschal lamb in our mouths nobody dares to challenge us. The blood on the door is an unanswerable answer to every accuser, caviller, or adversary.

Glory be to God, then, who thus can fetch out his people and deliver them from their sins, their lusts, their habits, their passions—deliver them from death—deliver them from going down into the pit, and so deliver them that none shall lay anything to their charge, since God has justified them and Christ has absolved them. May the Lord grant us grace to be used as his instruments as Moses was; and may we each one of us cry unto the Lord, if we are in bondage, just as Israel did in Egypt. The Lord in mercy send forth concerning every poor sinner here just such a message as he sent concerning his people in the house of bondage. "Thus saith the Lord; Let my son go, that he may serve me." If he will thus work among us as in the olden times, to him shall be the glory now at this present, yea, and for evermore. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Exodus iv. 10—17,
21—23; v. 1—9, 15—23; vi. 1—8.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—140, 220, 219.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE PROSPEROUS MAN'S REMINDER.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 27TH, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me. Therefore I will be unto them as a lion: as a leopard by the way will I observe them: I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps, and will rend the caul of their heart, and there will I devour them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them."—Hosea xiii. 5—8.

OUR text will lead me at this time to speak upon the perils of prosperity, and as those who are prospering in worldly circumstances make up a comparatively slender portion of any congregation the sermon must mainly aim at a small class. Still it is my duty to speak to these, for every word of scriptural warning should have its tongue in a complete ministry, and every condition of soul must be duly met by a watchful pastor. May the Holy Spirit enable me to make full proof of my ministry by declaring the whole counsel of God to all characters. Suffer me, however, to observe that, if the subject should seem to take a narrow range, it is in your power to alter it very rapidly; for, while those who are prospering will kindly take note of the voice of God's word to themselves, those of you who are not prospering may be profited by becoming the more contented with your lowly lot, since it will be plain to you that had you succeeded in life you might have fallen into the sins denounced in our text. It may be that you would never have known the holy joy and sacred peace which you now possess if you had been allowed to climb to those heights of wealth which you have longed to reach. God who knows your frame knew that you were not able to bear the trial of prosperity, and therefore he has kept you where you are,—more safe and more happy, though less enriched.

Another class of persons may have enjoyed fair weather in times past, but now a cloud has come over them and they are troubled. Possibly they may be taught by our discourse to say each one to himself, "God has taken me not so much out of the sunlight as out of the furnace. He saw that evils were generated by my success which would have caused

me solemn injury, and so he has removed me out of their reach. He has transplanted me out of the glare of the sunlight and set me in a place more shaded but more suited to my spiritual growth. There may also be some present who are eagerly aspiring after great things, and these may learn a lesson of sobriety. A desire to rise is laudable, but the winged horse needs to be well bitted and reined lest it fly away with its rider. Some spirits are dissatisfied with moderate success; they pine to reach the front ranks, and to climb to the high places of the earth. Ambition has become the star of their life, perhaps, I had better say—the will-o'-the-wisp of their folly. Let them learn from this morning's word that all is not gold that glitters, that outward prosperity doth not make men truly prosper, and that there is a way of growing rich without being rich towards God. I would lay a cool hand upon a fevered brow, and remind the ardent youth that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

Another word remains to be said before I proceed further: Hosea speaks of Ephraim, or Israel, the kingdom of the ten tribes, and we may profitably view that people as a type of ourselves. Israel represents the church, and yet not altogether the true spiritual church of God. They were not all Israel that were *of* Israel, for they were a seed according to the flesh, and hence they were a mixed multitude, and represent rather the professing Christian world than the elect Christian church. Now, I must take the text as I find it, and use it for those to whom it can fairly be applied, namely, general Christendom, the nominal people of God. For this reason the lines of distinction this morning between God's regenerated people and mere professors will be but faintly drawn in my address. It must be so, for I shall be speaking upon a truth which relates to a mixed people: and you must be the more careful in self-examination, so that each one may take home that which belongs to him. I speak to all Israel this morning, whether they be of Israel in spirit or not: to all the professing people of God, to all who meet with them at any time for public worship, or are numbered with them by general repute. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear," and may the Holy Spirit bless the hearing.

And now to our discourse.

I. The first subject suggested by the text is MEMORIES OF ADVERSITY.

The Lord says to many of us, "*I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought.*" Carefully consider this by taking a review of the past. Have you risen in the world? Have your circumstances changed? Or have you been raised up from a sick bed, or delivered from depths of anxiety? Are you now happily circumstanced, abounding in good things, and blessed with the temporal favour of God? I ask you to look back upon the way by which the Lord's hand has led you. Look back upon your early trials and the mercy which sustained you under them. To some of the prosperous their early difficulties were very severe, comparable even to the great drought of the wilderness. They were so unhappy and so bereft of all comfort that it may be said of them that they sought water and there was none, and their tongue failed for thirst. Thirst is one of the most terrible ills that can happen to men, and such were the wants and anxieties of many a man's early days: they rendered existence misery, and life itself a perpetual death. The

children of Israel went three days without water: they came to wells where they expected to drink, and found them brackish, so that they could not drink of them. Do not many of the Lord's people remember when things were very scant with them, when even the necessities of life were scarcely to be had, when they sought to friends for help but were disappointed? They were driven to their wits' end, their little store began to run out, and they counted out their last few pence almost as men sell their lives. Ah, those were wilderness days indeed! So, also, were those weeks which we spent upon a bed of sickness, when at night we cried, "Would God it were morning," and when daylight came the garish sun fatigued us, and we wished it were evening that we might sleep again. Perhaps neither of these were our particular trial, but we were distracted with many cares, and knew not on whom to depend for advice; we could not see our way; the thread of our life was a tangled skein, and we were sore perplexed in the attempt to unravel it. Often we held our poor head with both our hands, and felt as if we should lose our reason if fresh distractions assailed us. It was a land of great drought, a wilderness infested with serpents and scorpions. Do not let us forget that we traversed that desert road. Surely it is not difficult for us to refresh our memories upon that subject, for we usually retain a vivid recollection of our sorrows, and that vivid recollection I would now make use of to cause the past to live again before you.

The good point about those times was the fact that you did think of God. Why, then you went to him for every meal, and depended upon him from hour to hour as much as the Israelites depended upon him for the daily manna. The crust was hard but it was sweet, for the Lord gave it. Do you not recollect when everything in business seemed as if it must go to pieces: one large house failed on the one side, and another firm tottered at the other; your own case was hazardous, it seemed the turn of a hair whether you would be bankrupt or not? Ah, you remember it now, and you acknowledge that then you turned to God in real earnest, for you had nowhere else to turn. What times of prayer you had then! How sweet was that passage of Scripture which came like a prophecy to your heart! How you prized the prayers of God's people who cried to the Lord for you! Or was it sickness which tried you? Ah, then you remember how you turned your face to the wall, and like Hezekiah you sought the Lord with tears, pleading to be raised up again. The bitterness of pain made you cry, "My Father, help, strengthen, and relieve me." Those were times when you felt that you could not live without God. If there had been no God to go to you would have been driven to desperation. So though you knew him not as you would wish to know him, yet there was a God to you just as there was a God to Israel when the chosen tribes went through the wilderness and saw his glorious marchings in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.

God was manifest to your spirit then; ay, and what is better, *he knew you*. How beautiful are the words, "I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought." He was not ashamed to acknowledge you then, and to have dealings with you. Those poor prayers of yours, which you would not have prayed at all if it had not been for your stern necessity, were, nevertheless, answered by him, and he heard you, and

comforted you in a very wonderful way. Looking back you can see how he delivered you. It is true no manna dropped from heaven, yet your daily bread was given and you wondered, and felt as thankful as if it had fallen from the skies. It is true no rock of flint gave forth a stream for you to drink, and yet help came from people from whom you expected it as little as you would hope to see a fountain leap from a flinty rock. Somehow by the hand of the Lord you were sustained in trouble, and ultimately delivered out of it. The scene is marvellous in retrospect, and unless you believed that God's hand was in it, it would remain to you a perfect riddle; you feel that the only way of explaining your life is to believe in the everlasting hand of the Almighty. He succoured you, and your losses turned to gains. The burden which you thought would crush you was readily carried. The draught which was thought to be deadly turned out to be medicinal. You have now left the famine of the wilderness for plenty and ease; you have all that heart can wish, and your mouth is satisfied with good things; do not, however, forget for a moment how the Lord did know you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought.

Looking back upon that time, you see nothing that you can now boast of, because it was not so much that you did know God as that he did know you. You did pray and did believe after a sort, but it was very poor praying and very weak believing, yet the mercy of the Lord was great, and he did know you. He knew your whereabouts, he knew your temptations, he knew your weaknesses, he knew your wants; ay, and he knew how to meet the time of your need to the very tick of the clock. If he had waited five minutes later in relieving you it would have been too late, but he was punctual in his tenderness. He never is before his time: he never is too late. He helped you marvellously, though you were ready to faint at one time, and at other times were full of worldliness, murmuring, and rebellion. In looking back you feel compelled to say, "*He* knew me in the land of drought, but as for *me* even then I walked not faithfully before him; but there were wanderings of heart, even as in the case of Israel, who made a calf at Horeb and bowed before it, defiling even that holy place, the mountain of the Lord, where Jehovah had revealed himself."

The Lord knew us, blessed be his name, when we were in a desert land, in the howling wilderness, and his knowledge showed itself in practical help. Now, brethren and sisters, have you forgotten the loving-kindness of the Lord in the cloudy and dark day? If *you* have, *he has not*. Often in Scripture the Lord speaks of Israel's early days. He says, "I remember thee, the love of thine espousals when thou wentest after me into the wilderness:" as much as to say, "I recollect you when you were a young Christian, and how you were willing to suffer the loss of all things for my name's sake. I remember when you were poor and blessed my name for every morsel of bread which I gave you. I recollect when you lived in the poor little cottage in the back street, and how you cried unto me for help in your deep poverty, and praised me with tears standing in your eyes when your bread and your water were handed out to you." The Lord remembers a thousand things which *we* forget. The receiver seldom remembers the gift so long as the giver does. Ingratitude is a grievous fault, but it is sadly common, and

forgetfulness grows out of it. Yet it seems inevitable that the doer of kindness should have a better memory than the receiver of it. Our children forget what we did for them when they were little; but the mother cannot fail to remember all she suffered for her babe, neither does she forget the anxiety and care with which in her tenderness she brought her child through its varied sicknesses. The Lord remembers all that he has done for us, and he now by the word of his servant recalls it to our thoughts, saying, "I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought." Now, therefore, let us remember it also.

Assuredly to have received special mercy from God in time of sorrow should bind us with cords of gratitude. Do we not feel the force of the obligation? I will not delay you even with a word upon that subject, because your pure minds need but to be stirred up by way of remembrance, and you will be filled with thankfulness to the Lord, who helped you so graciously. Should it not also lead us to great humility when we recollect what we were? How dare we be proud?—*we* whom God lifted from the dunghill? He made David a king, but he reminded him of the time when he followed the ewes great with young, to pick up their lambs, like any other common shepherd boy. What if he did become great in Israel, yet once the sum total of his possessions was a staff, a wallet, and a sling. Some of us had no more when we began life. This should make us humble, and it will be well to mingle the humility and the gratitude together, and sing like Hannah of old: "The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them."

All this I bring before you now, my brethren, and I could wish that, as with the wand of a magician, I could make the past march before your very eyes. Then were the days of scanty bread but abundant thankfulness; of few changes of raiment, but many cries unto the Lord, of little gold but much grace, of small incomes but large outgoings of praise and zeal. Then you drank not the wine of indulgence, nor anointed yourselves with the oil of luxury, but yet the Lord knew you, and made your spirit glad. Necessity often drove you to your knees in prayer, and prompt answers turned your hearts to praise, and thus your soul was refreshed. Let it not now be said, "Of the rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee."

II. We must now enter upon a sadder subject, and, with the memories of adversity fresh upon us, consider THE TENDENCIES OF PROSPERITY. I hope, beloved friends, that many of you have, through divine grace, proved superior to these tendencies, and have been able to swim against the stream: if so, you will beyond all others be aware that such tendencies exist, for you have had to resist them with no small effort. I fear, on the other hand, that I should be a flatterer if I professed to hope that all of you have so escaped. In so large a number of professed Christians as we have here, we dare not hope that all have escaped unhurt from the furnace of worldly prosperity. At least the smell of the fire lingers upon some of us. Let us with much searching

of heart look to the text, and then judge ourselves; and the more so if Providence has dealt bountifully with us.

We read in our text, "According to their pasture, so were they filled;" that is to say, the Israelites became *earthly-minded*. They were filled according to their pasture, and not according to their God. They satisfied themselves with temporal good, and asked for nothing more. They lived *upon* their possessions, not above them. They made a God of their goods; they filled their desires and their affections with the good things of this life, and knew nothing of the fulness of God. They entered into Canaan, where they ate the fat and drank the sweet, and there they settled down, content without the higher blessings of grace. They did not want their God now, for now they were neither dependent on the manna nor on the stream which leaped from the rock. If God had been their pasture it would have been well to have been filled according to their pasture; but foolishly they tried to live on bread alone, and the word of God was despised. Alas, this is an evil into which many fall. They increase in riches and they set their hearts upon them.

Permit me, dear friends, to recall your hearts to your first love, and to the highest and best things. Know you not that God usually gives the most of earthly wealth to those for whom he has no love? Those who are masters of earth's treasures are seldom the favourites of heaven. It is a wonder when an Ethiopian treasurer is baptized, or a Joseph of Arimathea confesses himself a disciple of Jesus. Gold and the gospel usually go two different ways. Those who roll in wealth seldom rest in God. How many among the princes of the earth are also heirs of heaven? Is it not true that not many of the great men after the flesh are chosen? Worldly possessions are evidently lightly esteemed of God, for he gives little of them to his children, and the most of them he shoots out at the feet of worldlings, as men cast husks in plenty into the trough for swine. Do not, therefore, set a high price on that which the Lord lightly esteems. Your Lord and Master had none of the world's goods, Jesus had not where to lay his head; do not, therefore, covet what he despised.

Remember, again, that the quality of earthly things is very inferior, and altogether unworthy of the love of an immortal soul. What is there in broad acres to satisfy the heart? What is there in bonds, and mortgages, and debentures, and gold, and silver to stay a soul when it fainteth, or to make a spirit rejoice when it is heavy? Earthly gear hath its uses, advantages, and benefits, otherwise we could not ask you to be thankful for it. Wealth is a thing to be grateful for, since it may be turned to admirable account for God's glory, but the tendency will be for you to think too much of it, and if you do I would remind you that you are coming down from the position which a Christian ought to occupy, and are acting like a man of the world who has his portion in this life. A child of God should continually say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." It will never do for you to dote upon your property. What! are you going to dethrone your God, and set up wealth in his place? Then in what do you differ from the Israelites, who bowed before a calf of gold, and said, "These be thy gods, O Israel"? Far be it from us to sin in that fashion, but let us love the Lord for his

mercies, and the more we have of them the more let us be devoted to his fear.

Recollect, again, that earthly things ought not to be too highly esteemed, for they may vanish from our sight. How many instances of this have happened around us of late! The Lord have pity upon the many who have had grievously to suffer by the misconduct of others. Truly in their case riches have taken to themselves wings, and those who ought to have held the birds have been among the first to cause their flight. Hundreds were yesterday in comfortable circumstances, and are to-day deprived of all, and know not where the matter will end. You perhaps say, "The like could not happen to me. I have no shares in a bank. My liabilities are all limited; I cannot lose my property." How do you know? No man till his last hour is beyond the reach of those calamities which are common to men. There was never a garment yet which moth could not eat, or time devour; nor is there gold or silver in human coffer which the thief could not steal somehow or other, despite iron safes, legal documents, sound investments, and experienced prudence. Riches are but as the mist of the morning, or the smoke from the chimney. They will certainly perish in the using, take care that you do not perish with them.

Once more, recollect that even if wealth does not fly away you may soon lose all power to enjoy it. What is the value of a thousand a year to a man who is paralysed? To one who lies upon his back from morning till night, of what use is the park and the estate which he cannot see? To one who has to be confined to his chamber, of what avail is it that he has the means of travelling round the world? The Lord can take away from a man his taste, and of what use are his dainties? his eyesight, and of what value are his works of art? his hearing, and of what avail are the daughters of music? The Lord can leave us the apparent blessing, and yet the soul of it may have gone with the power to enjoy it. Moreover, how soon must you leave these temporal comforts! The day must come when you must bid farewell to house and garden, and children and friends, and all that you possess, and "Earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes," must be the end of you as well as of the poorest man that ever begged his bread. Do not, therefore, set your heart upon these toys, nor let your mind be filled by them, for if you do you have already met with one of the most serious of the evils which haunt a successful life.

The next peril is that of *greediness*, for, according to the text, these people were filled twice. "According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled." Their fulness is twice mentioned. They were not satisfied with being filled; they must be filled again. What numbers of persons there are who, when they were in their low estate, thought if they could ever amass a certain sum they would be perfectly satisfied; but when they reached that point, they laughed at their own folly. "Oh," they said, "if I might double, or treble, or multiply it tenfold, then I should reckon that I had enough of this world, and I would begin to think of eternal matters." But even when they reach that tenfold height they are not one whit more content. Still they long for something more. They are like men who drink sea water to quench their thirst; they become more thirsty still. The danger of worldly wealth lies in this,

that a man at last gets to be nothing better than an ox yoked to the plough, clogged with thick clay. Like a horse harnessed to a chariot, the more there is attached to such a man the heavier his toil. Instead of gaining greater enjoyment many a rich man only accumulates heavier care as his fortune increases. In the case of those in the text, they cared only for themselves; "they were filled,—they were filled." They never thought of consecrating their substance to God. No, it was retained for filling themselves. They thought not of blessing the name of God for enabling them to get wealth, nor of making every mercy to be a wing upon which the grateful soul would soar on high. No, their whole mind was given to filling and being filled again. There was no living above it all, but they lived *for* it, they lived *by* it, and lived *under* it, like moles burrowing in the earth. "They were filled, they were filled." Alas, for those who can be filled with this poor earth: they will have no portion in the world to come, for they have received their good things, and their turn will come to dwell with that rich man of whom our Lord spake, who went from faring sumptuously to suffering eternally.

What came next? They were filled, and *their heart was exalted*. This is that of which the Lord warned his people in Deuteronomy viii. 12—14. "Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." As for those in our text, they were rich, and felt that they were somebodies. When they were in the wilderness, in the land of drought, their God was everything; but now they were filled, and they were swollen with self-importance. Their bags were full, their barns were bursting, their lands were far-reaching, and therefore they thought highly of themselves; as if a man could be measured by the rood, or reckoned up in pounds, shillings, and pence. "A man's a man for a' that," said the homely poet, when he sang of those who have neither rank nor money. Many men are swollen by the meat they feed on, poisoned by their mercies, till they are bloated with arrogance, and begin to despise their fellows. Children of God whom they were once pleased to associate with are now "so very vulgar." They despise those who are much better than themselves, more prayerful and more holy, and they leave their company to go into *society*; as if the children of God were not the best society under heaven. Alas, some professors choose their company not by rules of grace, but of pelf; the saints have not so much corn and wine and oil, nor can they ride so high a horse as the prosperous sinners, and therefore the base-born professor turns his back on them. Poor Lazarus, whom once they would have honoured, now lies at their gate full of sores for dogs to lick. They value not the people of God for their character; but because they are poor they speak lightly of them.

When the deceitfulness of riches works its way there is no longer any walking humbly with God, nor simple dependence upon him. There is little or no prizing of grace, and seeking after it as for hid treasure, for are not the barns full, and is not that enough? And now the spiritual worship of God becomes too plain and commonplace, and something

more pleasing to the eye, and to the flesh, must be sought after. The Israelite only saw the temple on certain days of the year, and then the main sight was a sacrifice, and so the great ones asked for something more pompous, more impressive to the eye : hence came the oxen set up at Dan and Bethel, with services most pompous and performances most abundant. To-day, also, the simple worshippers of the unseen God carry on a worship which is too bare and unadorned, there is nothing æsthetic about it, and therefore the great ones must go off to the national religion, even as Ephraim did in the days of Jeroboam, for there they can have dainty dresses, fine music, the smell of incense, and all that can charm the taste. Besides, do not all the rest of the wealthy of the land go that way? Hence we see men forsake their former associates, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage. Their hearts are exalted by their prosperity, and God and his people and his truth may all go. Better far that riches had never come near them. Examples are close at hand.

And what next? It is further written, "*They have forgotten me.*" Their God was forgotten, even him to whom they owed all things. Ah, they would talk much about him in their humble days, when they met with those that thought upon his name, but now there is not a word for God. Then they spake often one to another, but now God is seldom mentioned, for he is not much known in fashionable society. The Lord Jesus is seldom spoken of, for how should the carpenter's Son be the theme of polite conversation? I am not saying that this is the case with any one here present, but as this is the tendency of prosperity, I should not wonder if some of you are yielding to it. Therefore, arouse yourselves to escape the evil. Do not forget that God alone is fulness, and that outward possessions are emptiness apart from him. The tendency of the outward possession is to make us forget that it is only the shell, and God must be the kernel of all true comfort and delight. Prosperous men are apt to forget that they will find out very soon how much they need the Lord. While the prosperous man is looking over his accounts and storing up his gold he may dare to forget God, but when he comes to himself and repents of his worldliness he will have to creep to Jesus' feet like the poorest servant on his farm. If saved from his idolatry of money he will have to cry unto the Lord to manifest himself to him, even as he did when he could scarcely find himself with bread from day to day. It will not do, my brethren, for us to exalt ourselves and act as if we were independent of God, for our very being rests on his will, and we are nothings and nobodies after all. It would not do for the successful preacher to pride himself upon the number of his congregation or upon the power which he wields over men's minds, for he is nothing but a poor sinner after all, spared through the compassion of God and pardoned through Jesus Christ, even as others. Humble gratitude is the only safe and right and happy condition of the mind in prosperity. Now, have you not seen, even if you have not felt it in yourself, that many persons who prosper in the world forsake religion altogether? While they were in humble circumstances one had hope of them, but now they seem quite out of reach of sanctifying influences. Have you not seen others grow cold and worldly? I will not ask if you have felt this declension in yourselves, but have you not noticed it in others? They used to be at every prayer meeting, but now they cannot find time : they

worked hard in the Sunday-school, but now their energies are overtaxed with doing nothing. Now that they have much more opportunity of serving God, and more to serve him with than they ever had before, they do less than in their humbler times. Do you not know some—may it not be so with yourselves—who do not walk anything like so near to God now as they used to do? Barefooted they kept the way of the Lord, but in velvet slippers they go astray. Richer times have come for them, but they are not happier, because they are further off from God. Is not this very grievous, and will it not provoke the Lord?

I will put to you one question. Can you find in the Word of God one instance of a man of God who was injured by his troubles? Do they not all, like Job, come out of the furnace of affliction much profited thereby? Let me then ask another question. Is it not almost a rule with us, though it ought not to be, that our prosperity is our loss? David, when hunted like a partridge on the mountains, glorified the Lord his God; but David, when he abode in a palace, sinned again and again, so that the Holy Spirit draws a distinction between his earlier and his latter life, for it is written of Jehoshaphat that he walked before the Lord *in the first ways* of his father David. Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived, was not proof against prosperity. He had all he could desire, and then his earthly loves stole away his heart. Take one case, which will give both sides of the matter. See Hezekiah with Sennacherib's letter spreading it before the Lord in faith: he is then an example in history, a man of God to be envied for his prayer of faith. He is far fallen when his realm is at peace and his riches are multiplied, for he becomes vainglorious and displays to the Babylonian ambassadors all his treasures, and provokes the Lord his God. Brethren and sisters, I wish you great prosperity, but far more do I wish you great grace, that you may carry a full cup with a steady hand. There is need to pray for men who are going up hill, lest they fall upon their high places. In our low estate grace will surely be given, for the Lord pities us, but when we are rising we have double need to pray, for God resisteth the proud.

III. Under the third head we must consider VISITATIONS OF RETRIBUTION. Ingratitude to God, of the kind I have described, is sure to bring with it, in the case of the believer, heavy chastisements, and in the case of the unbeliever, sure and overwhelming punishments.

Now please notice what the Lord says, "Therefore I will be unto them as a lion; as a leopard by the way will I observe them: I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps, and will rend the caul of their heart, and there will I devour them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them." In the case of men who have prospered in this world and turned aside from God it often happens that *fierce trials* come upon them, such as are here described under the figure of a lion, a leopard, a bear, and a wild beast. In the case of the Israelitish nation this prophecy was singularly fulfilled, for, according to the seventh chapter of the book of Daniel, nations comparable to the lion, the leopard, the bear, and the wild beast, namely the Babylonian, the Persian, the Greek, and the Roman empires all dealt with the Jews and brought them into subjection. I do not lay any stress upon that, as though I were interpreting prophecy, but it is very singular that those four beasts mentioned here should be the very four afterwards mentioned in the visions of Daniel. I rather take the

metaphorical meaning. We are here taught that as God visited his people Israel with stroke upon stroke, and made his great wrath to be known, so has he often done against backsliding believers. God is a shepherd to his people to guard them from the lion, but when his people depart from him he himself becomes as a lion to them. I have seen rich professors with God against them. I have seen the man multiplying wealth, and multiplying sorrow. His sons have grown up to vice and profligacy, using their father's wealth to indulge their passions, till the old man has been ready to tear his hair in anguish. His own children have been as lions to him. Have we never known such persons too, living entirely to themselves, become the victims of wretched manias which have made them believe themselves to be poor while surrounded with luxury? Such despondencies are worse than a bear robbed of her whelps. Have we not known millionaires haunted with the dread of sudden disaster, as though God would leap upon them like a leopard? Men have been struck down with depression of spirit, so that they could not rejoice in anything: they seemed to be torn by their own thoughts, as by wild beasts, and yet they had more than heart could wish. When the Lord had multiplied mercies around them they had not used them for his glory, but only filled themselves with them, and therefore the Lord visited them in anger for their selfish ingratitude. It is often a great mercy when God sends these heavy trials, for if they befall his own children, it is by such trials that he drives them home to himself; the lions roar them back to Christ, and the leopards and the bears drive them home to their old standing, so that they return unto their Saviour, and Jesus is again precious to them.

But sometimes these wild beasts are of a spiritual character. Doubts, fears, horrors come forth from the Lord against the backsliders in heart. The Lord, who was all gentleness, and kindness, and love to them, now seems to have become their enemy. This is sadly the case with any of us when we forget God. We turn to his word, and it threatens us: we get to our knees, and we cannot pray; thoughts of our past sins haunt us; we have no peace with God, no rest day nor night: God lets loose all the wild beasts upon us, and we cannot escape, they tear and rend us. Ah, he knew us in the land of drought, and then he multiplied our mercies; but we went away from him, and became cold of heart, and it is, therefore, no wonder that now he withdraws his consolations, and sends furious convictions to hunt us down. It is God's way of saving us, making our very destructions to be the means of our salvation, by driving us out of ourselves. Our God will not suffer his people to build their nests here. You may be sure of that. We are not of the earth, neither will our heavenly Father suffer us to be filled with the earth. If he has ordained us to eternal life by Christ Jesus he will drive us out of the haunts of deadly selfishness by lions, by bears, by leopards, by wild beasts, or by some means or other, and he will fetch us to himself.

Did you notice one passage here in this threatening, where the Lord speaks of the trouble as coming terribly home to his people's hearts? "I will rend the caul of their heart." That is to say, he will rend that which encloses and shuts up their heart. When a man loves the world it shuts up his heart, blocks it all round, and leaves no room for God. It is a great blessing when God rends the caul of a man's heart and opens it

once again to the entrance of the truth. It is a sweet thing to have the heart opened as Lydia's was, by the sacred latch-key of love; but when we forget God, and backslide, the keyhole is stuffed up, and the latch-key will not act. The heart suffers from fatty degeneration, until it might almost be said of the children of God even as of worldlings, "Their heart is as fat as grease." There is no getting at them, no making them feel: they have but little life, little love, little zeal for God, therefore the Lord sends these lions, leopards and bears, and they rage and rend until at last they tear the caul of the heart. Then the man undergoes a death of despair; but what a mercy it is that the Lord raises him up by-and-by to the life of hope, even as a little further down in this chapter we read that precious word, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death." The Lord brings up his poor dead child again and gives him life and joy, and then he truly lives in the service of his Lord.

Now, sinners, if, after God has been very gracious to you, you will not learn the lesson of his love, but refuse Christ, you will be given up to destruction, and as for lions, leopards, bears, or worms that never die, and fires that never can be quenched, these are only faint emblems of the woe which will come upon you because you have refused the Lord. As for you who are believers, he will not utterly destroy you; but if you turn aside from him you will make a rod for yourselves, and let loose bears and lions which the Lord would have kept caged if you had walked near to him. "When a man's ways please the Lord he maketh his enemies to be at peace with him;" so that the beasts of the field and the stones of the field are at league with the man that is living near to God. But if you walk contrary to him he will walk contrary to you, and he will call for his lions and beasts of prey, that they may trouble and molest you. He will give you water, that you die not for thirst, but it shall be the water of bitterness; and he will give you bread to eat, that you faint not, but it shall be mingled with ashes, till your soul shall abhor its ingratitude and turn unto the Lord.

If I had time I should have spoken upon a fourth head, but I can do no more than say that close upon the text there are **INTIMATIONS OF MERCY**. See what intimations of mercy there are in the next verse. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, *but in me is thine help*." There is help for the wanderer, and help for the man who has grieved his God. Read also these words, with which the next chapter opens, and may the Holy Ghost help you to carry them out, "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him." The Lord fulfil that word for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Deuteronomy viii.
and Hosea xiii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—84, 799, 809.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SORROW AT THE CROSS TURNED INTO JOY.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 3RD, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."—
John xvi. 20—22.

We were singing just now a hymn in which the first verse started a difficult question—

" 'It is finish'd;' shall we raise
Songs of sorrow, or of praise?
Mourn to see the Saviour die,
Or proclaim his victory?"

The case is very well argued in the second and third verses—

"If of Calvary we tell,
How can songs of triumph swell?
If of man redeem'd from woe,
How shall notes of mourning flow?
Ours the guilt which pierced his side,
Ours the sin for which he died;
But the blood which flow'd that day
Wash'd our sin and guilt away."

The conclusion at which we arrived in the concluding verse seems to me to be the right one—

"Lamb of God! Thy death hath given
Pardon, peace, and hope of heaven:
'It is finish'd;' let us raise
Songs of thankfulness and praise!"

The chief thought connected with the Redeemer's death should be that of grateful praise. That our Lord Jesus Christ died upon the cross is a very natural cause for sorrow, and well may they who pierced him, and
No. 1,442.

we are all among the number, look unto him and mourn for their sin, and be in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. Before we know that we are pardoned our grief may well be exceeding heavy, for till sin is put away we stand guilty of the Saviour's blood. While our souls are only conscious of our guilty share in the Redeemer's blood, we may well stand aghast at the sight of the accursed tree, but the case is altered when by faith we discern the glorious fruit of our Lord's sufferings, and know that on the cross he saved us and triumphed in the deed. The feeling of sorrow at the sight of the crucified Saviour is one to be cultivated up to a certain point, especially if we take care to avoid mere sentiment and turn our grief into repentance: then it is "godly sorrow," which worketh after a godly sort, and it is likely to create in us an intense horror of sin, and a strong determination to purge ourselves from all fellowship with the works of darkness. We do not therefore condemn those who frequently preach upon the sufferings of our Lord, with the view of exciting emotions of grief in the hearts of their hearers, for such emotions have a softening and sanctifying influence if attended by faith, and directed by sound wisdom. There is, however, a middle path in everything, and this needs to be followed, for we believe that such preaching may be carried too far. It is most remarkable and instructive that the apostles do not appear in their sermons or epistles to have spoken of the death of our Lord with any kind of regret. The gospels mention their distress during the actual occurrence of the crucifixion, but after the resurrection, and especially after Pentecost, we hear of no such grief. I can scarcely find a passage from which I could preach a sermon upon sorrow on account of the death of Jesus, if I confine myself to the sayings and writings of the apostles; on the contrary, there are many expressions which treat of the crucifixion in the spirit of exulting joy. Remember the well-known exclamation of Paul—"God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." He had, no doubt, as vivid an idea of the agonies of our Lord as any of us have ever attained, and yet, instead of saying, "God forbid that I should cease to weep at the sight of my crucified Master," he declares that he glories in his cross. The death of Jesus was to him a thing to rejoice in, and even to glory in; he kept no black fasts to commemorate the world's redemption. Note well the exalted key in which he speaks of our Lord's death in the epistle to the Colossians: "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it." When you turn to John's epistles, where most of all pathos and tenderness would naturally abound, you hear no weeping and wailing, but he speaks of the cleansing blood, which is the very centre of the great sacrifice, in a calm, quiet, happy manner, which is far removed from bursting grief and flowing tears. He says, "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." This allusion to the blood of atonement rather suggests joy and peace than woe and agony. "This is he," saith John, "that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood;" and it is evidently to him a theme of

congratulation and delight rather than a cause for sorrow that Jesus did come by blood as well as by water. So Peter, also, when he mentions the death of his Lord and Master, speaks of "the precious blood of Christ," but not in words of sadness, and he describes our Lord's bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, but not in the language of lament. He says of those who suffered for the gospel, "Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers in Christ's sufferings." Now, if he finds joy in those sufferings of ours which are in fellowship with the sufferings of Christ, much more I gather did he find ground for rejoicing in the sufferings of Christ himself. I do not believe that the "three hours' agony," the darkened church, the altar in mourning, the tolling of a bell, and all the other mock funeral rites of superstition derive even the least encouragement from the spirit and language of the apostles. Those practical charades in which the crucifixion is mimicked in many churches on Good Friday are more worthy of the heathen women weeping for *Thamuz*, or of *Baal's* priests crying and cutting themselves with knives, than of a Christian assembly who know that the Lord is not here, for he is risen.

Let us mourn by all means, for Jesus died; but by no means let us make mourning the prominent thought in connection with his death, if we have obtained thereby the pardon of our sins. The language of our text allowed and yet forbade sorrow; it gave permission to weep, but only for a little while, and then it forbade all further weeping by the promise to turn the sorrow into joy. "Ye shall weep and lament," that is, his disciples, while he was dying, and dead and buried, would be sorely distressed. "And ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy;" their grief would end when they saw him risen from the dead; and so it did, for we read, "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." The sight of the cross to their unbelief was sadness, and sadness only, but now to the eye of faith it is the gladdest sight that ever the human eye can rest upon: the cross is as the light of the morning, which ends the long and dreary darkness which covered the nations. Oh, wounds of Jesus, ye are as stars, breaking the night of man's despair. Oh, spear, thou hast opened the fountain of healing for mortal woe. Oh, crown of thorns, thou art a constellation of promises. Eyes that were red with weeping sparkle with hope at the sight of thee, O bleeding Lord. As for thy tortured body, O Emmanuel, the blood which dropped therefrom cried from the ground, and proclaimed peace, pardon, Paradise to all believers. Though laid in the grave by thy weeping friends, thy body, O divine Saviour, is no longer in Joseph's tomb, for thou art risen from the dead, and we find in the songs of resurrection and ascension an abundant solace for the griefs of thy death. Like a woman to whom a son is born, we forget the travail for the joy of the glorious birth which the church and the world may now gaze upon with the utmost delight as they behold in Jesus "the firstborn from the dead."

The subject for this morning, then, you will readily guess is, how far we should sorrow for the death of Jesus, and how much further we are permitted to rejoice therein. The first point will be, *the death of our Lord was and still is a theme for sorrow*; but secondly, *that sorrow is transmutated into joy*. When we have meditated upon these two points we shall for a little space notice a *general principle which underlies all holy sorrow as well as this particular form of it*.

I. First, then, THE DEATH OF OUR LORD WAS AND IS A THEME FOR SORROW. I make a point of saying it *was* so, because during the three days of the Saviour's burial there was more cause for distress than there can be now that he is risen. To the disciples first of all the death of Jesus was *the loss of his personal presence*. It was a great delight to that little family to have the Lord always among them as their father and their teacher, and it was a great grief to think that they should no more hear his loving voice, or catch the smile of his benignant countenance. It brought untold comforts to them to be able to go to him with all their questions, to fly to him in every moment of difficulty, to resort to him in every hour of sorrow. Happy, happy disciples to have such a Master always in their midst, communing with them in love, guiding them by his perfect example, animating them by his glorious presence, relieving all their wants and guarding them from all ills. Do you wonder that their hearts were heavy at the prospect of his going away from them? They felt that they would be sheep without a shepherd: orphan children bereft of their best friend and helper. Do you wonder, I say, that they wept and lamented when the Rock of their confidence, the delight of their eyes, the hope of their souls, was taken from them? What would you think if your best earthly friend was hurried away from you by a shameful death? They sorrowed not only because of their own personal loss by his removal, but because he himself was very dear to them. They could not bear that he should be gone in whom their hearts centred all their affection. Their sorrow showed that their hearts were loyal to their Beloved, and would never receive another occupant to sit upon the throne of their affections. They wept and they lamented because their bosom's Lord was gone and his seat was empty. They could not endure the absence of their best Beloved. As pines the dove for its mate, so mourned they for him whom their soul loved. Whom had they in heaven if Jesus were gone? Certainly there was none upon earth that they could desire beside him. They were widowed, and they wept and refused to be comforted. Nothing could compensate them for Jesus' absence, for he was their all in all. For his sake they had left all and followed him, and now they cannot bear that they should lose him, and so lose more than all. You who have been bereaved of those whom you have dearly loved, and deeply revered, will be able to guess what kind of sorrow filled the hearts of the disciples when their Beloved said that he was about to go from them, and that they would not see him for awhile. This mourning was natural; and it is natural that we also should feel some regret that our Lord is away from us now, as to his bodily presence, though I trust we have by this time learned to see the expediency of his absence, and are so satisfied with it that we patiently wait, and quietly hope until his next appearing.

It added greatly to the disciples' sorrow that *the world would be rejoicing* because their Lord was gone. "The world shall rejoice." His eager enemies would hasten him off to Pilate's judgment-seat, and triumph when they forced an unwilling sentence from that time-serving ruler. They would rejoice when they saw him bearing his cross along the way of dolours. They would stand around the cross and mock him with their cruel gazes and with their ribald speeches, and when he was

and they would say, "This deceiver can speak no more; we have triumphed over him who set our pretensions at nought, and exposed us before the people." They thought that they had quenched the light which had proved painful to their darkened eyes, and therefore they were glad, and by their gladness swelled the torrent of the disciples' sorrow. Brethren, you know when you are in pain or in sorrow yourselves, how very bitter is the coarse laugh of an adversary who exults over your misery and extracts mirth from your tears. This made the disciples smart at their Lord's death. Why should the wicked rejoice over him? Why should the scornful Pharisee and priest insult over his dead body? This rubbed salt into the wounds of the downcast disciples, and infused a double gall and wormwood into the cup which was bitter enough already. You do not wonder, therefore, that they wept and lamented when their Lord was put to death by wicked hands. Magdalene weeping at the sepulchre acted as her gracious nature prompted her, and she was a fair sample of all the rest.

They had this also to make them sorrowful, that *his death was for a time the disappointment of all their hopes*. They at first had fondly looked for a kingdom—a temporal kingdom, such as their brother Jews expected. Even when our Lord had moderated their expectations and enlightened their views, so that they did not quite so much look for an actual temporal sovereignty, yet still that thought that "this was he that could have restored the kingdom to Israel" lingered with them. If any of them were so enlightened as to believe in a spiritual kingdom, as perhaps some of them were in a measure, yet by Jesus' death it must have seemed that all their hopes were shattered. Without a leader, how could they succeed? How could a kingdom be set up when the King himself was slain? He who has been by coward hands betrayed, how can he reign? He that was to be the King has been spat upon and mocked, and nailed up like a felon to the gibbet of wood—where is his dominion? He is cut off out of the land of the living, who will now serve him? Clay cold his body lies in Joseph's tomb, and a seal is set upon the stone which shuts up the sepulchre; is there not an end of holy hopes, a final close to all holy ambitions? How can they be happy who have seen an end of their fairest life-dream? Poor followers of the dead monarch, how can they have hope for his cause and crown? Doubtless in their unbelief they sorrowed deeply because their hope seemed blasted and their faith o'erturned. They knew so little of the meaning of the present, and guessed so little of what the future would be, that sorrow filled their hearts, and they were ready to perish.

You must remember that added to this was *the sight* which many of them had *of their beloved Master in his agonies*. Who would not grieve to see him hurried away at dead of night from holy retirement to be publicly accused? Might not angels wish to weep in sympathy with him? Who can forbear to sorrow when Jesus stands insulted by menials, reviled by abjects, forsaken by his friends, blasphemed by his foes. It was enough to make a man's heart break to see the Lamb of God so roughly handled. Who can endure to see the innocent Saviour nailed up there in the midst of a scornful crew? Who could endure to see his pangs as they were mirrored in his countenance, or to hear his sorrows as they expressed themselves in his painful cries of "I thirst," and in the still sharper agonising

exclamation, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It is little marvel that it was said of the Virgin that the sword pierced through her heart, for surely there was never sorrow like unto Jesus' sorrow, nor grief which could be likened unto his grief. His heavy woes must have pierced through the heart of all right-minded men who beheld his unexampled miseries; and especially must all personal lovers of Christ have felt ready to die themselves when they saw him thus put to death. Oh deeps of sorrow which my Lord has suffered, shall there be no deeps to answer to you? When all God's waves and billows go over thee, O Jesus, shall not we be plunged into sorrow also? Yes, verily, we will drink of thy cup and be baptized with thy baptism. We will now sit down before thy cross and watch with thee one hour, while love and grief conjointly occupy our souls.

Now, even at the recollection of what our Lord endured, every Christian feels sympathy with him. You cannot read the four stories of the evangelists, and weave them into one by imagination and affection, without feeling that the minor key befits your voice at such a time, if you at all attempt to sing. There must be, it is natural that there should be, sorrow because Christ has died.

One of the sharpest points about our sorrow at Jesus' death is this—that *we were the cause of it*. We virtually crucified the Lord, seeing it was because we were sinners that he must needs be made a sacrifice. Had none of us gone astray like lost sheep, then our wanderings would not have been gathered up and laid upon the shepherd's head. The sword which pierced his heart through and through was forged by our offences: the vengeance was due for sins which *we* had committed, and justice exacted its rights at his hands. What loving disciple will refuse to sorrow when he sees that he himself has put his Lord to death?

Now, putting all these things together, I think I see abundant reason why the disciples should be sorrowful, and why they should even express their sorrow by weeping and lamenting. They sorrowed as those do who attend a funeral: for weeping and lamenting abound at eastern funerals. Orientals are much more demonstrative than we are, and therefore at the deaths of relatives they make a far greater show of grief by loud cries and flowing tears. The disciples are represented as using the same forcible expressions to set forth their woe—"Ye shall weep and lament,"—a woe worthy of the buried One whom they mourned. "Ye shall weep and lament": there was a double vent for a double sorrow, eyes wept and voices lamented. Christ's death was a true funeral to his followers, and caused a crushing sorrow as much as if they had each one been bereft of all his house. Who marvels that it was so?

"Sorrow hath filled your hearts," says Christ: they had no room to think of anything else but his death. Their heart was full to bursting with grief because he was taken from them, and that grief was so sharp as to be likened to one of the keenest pangs which nature is capable of bearing, the pangs of a travailing woman, pangs which seem as if they must bring death with them, and compared with which death itself might be a relief. The sharpness of their anguish in the hour of their trial was all that they could bear, more would have destroyed them. All this they felt, and it is no wonder if we feel in some degree as they

did when we take a retrospect of what the Saviour endured on our behalf. So far we are bound to concede that the death of our Lord worketh sorrow: but there is a moderation even in the most justifiable mourning, and we are not to indulge excessive grief even at the foot of the cross, lest it degenerate into folly.

II. Now, secondly, the truth taught expressly in the text is that **THIS SORROW IS CHANGED INTO JOY**. "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy." Not exchanged for joy, but actually transmuted, so that the grief becomes joy, the cause of sorrow becomes the source of rejoicing.

Begin with what I said was a very sharp point of this sorrow, and you will see at once how it is turned into joy. That Jesus Christ died for our sins is a sharp sorrow: we lament that our crimes became the nails and our unbelief the spear: and yet, my brethren, this is the greatest joy of all. If each one of us can say, "He loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*," we are truly happy. If you know by personal faith that Jesus took your sin and suffered for it on the tree, so that now your debt is paid and your transgression is blotted out for ever by his precious blood, you do not want half-a-dozen words from me to indicate that this, which was the centre of your grief, is also the essence of your joy. What were it to us if he had saved all the rest of mankind if he had not redeemed *us* unto God by his blood? We might have been glad from sheer humanity that others should be benefited, but what would have been our deep regret to be ourselves excluded from the grace. Blessed be the Saviour's name, we are not excepted: in proportion as we repentantly upbraid ourselves for Jesus' death in that same measure may we believingly exult in the fact that his sacrifice has for ever put away our sins, and therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Because God hath condemned sin in the flesh of Jesus Christ, therefore he will no more condemn us; but we are henceforth free, that the righteousness of the law may be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. Heartily do we lament our sin, but we do not lament that Christ has put it away nor lament the death by which he put it away; rather do our hearts rejoice in all his atoning agonies, and glory at every mention of that death by which he has reconciled us unto God. 'Tis a sad thought that we committed the sin which burdened our Lord, but it is a joy to think that he has taken on himself our personal sin and carried it right away.

The next point of joy is that Jesus Christ has now suffered all that was required of him. That he should suffer was cause for grief, but that he has now suffered all is equal cause for joy. When a champion returns from the wars bearing the scars of conflict by which he gained his honours, does anyone lament over his campaigns? When he left the castle his wife hung about his neck and mourned that her lord must go to the wars, to bleed and perhaps to die; but when he returns with sounding trumpet and banner held aloft, bringing his trophies with him, honoured and exalted by reason of his victories in many lands, do his dearest friends regret his toils and sufferings? Do they keep fasts correspondent to the days in which he was covered with the sweat and dust of battle! Do they toll a bell on the anniversary of his conflict? Do they weep over the scars which are still upon him? Do they not glory in them as honourable memorials of his valour? They reckon

that the marks the hero bears in his flesh are the noblest insignia of his glory, and the best tokens of his prowess. So let us not grieve to-day that Jesus' hands were pierced; behold they are now "as gold rings set with the beryl." Let us not lament that his feet were nailed to the tree, for his legs are now as "pillars of marble set upon sockets of fine gold." The face more marred than that of any man is now the more lovely for its marring, and he himself, despite his agonies, is now endowed with a beauty, which even the ravished spouse in the song could only describe as "altogether lovely." The mighty love which enabled him to endure his mighty passion has impressed upon him charms altogether inconceivable in their sweetness. Let us not mourn, then, for the agony is all over now, and he is none the worse for having endured it. There is no cross for him now, except in the sense that the cross honours and glorifies him; there remains for him no cruel spear nor crown of thorns now, except that from these he derives a revenue of honour and titles ever new, which exalt him higher and yet higher in the love of his saints. Glory be unto God, Christ has not left a pang unsuffered of all his substitutionary sorrows; of our dread ransom price he has paid the utmost farthing. The atoning griefs have all been endured, the cup of wrath is drunk quite dry, and because of this we, with all the hosts above, will rejoice for ever and ever.

We are glad, not only that the hour of travail is over, but that our Lord has survived his pains. He died a real death, but now he lives a real life. He did lie in the tomb, and it was no fiction that the breath had departed from him: it is equally no fiction that our Redeemer liveth. The Lord is risen indeed. He hath survived the death struggle and the agony, and he lives unhurt: he has come out of the furnace without so much as the smell of fire upon him. He is not injured in any faculty, whether human or divine. He is not robbed of any glory, but his name is now surrounded with brighter lustre than ever. He has lost no dominion, he claims superior rights and rules over a new empire. He is a gainer by his losses, he has risen by his descent. All along the line he is victorious at every point. Never yet was there a victory won but what it was in some respects a loss as well as a gain, but our Lord's triumph is unmingled glory—to himself a gain as well as to us who share in it. Shall we not then rejoice? What, would ye sit and weep by a mother as she exultingly shows her new-born child? Would you call together a company of mourners to lament and to bewail when the heir is born into the household? This were to mock the mother's gladness. And so to-day shall we use dreary music and sing dolorous hymns when the Lord is risen, and is not only unhurt, unharmed, and unconquered, but is far more glorified and exalted than before his death? He hath gone into the glory because all his work is done, shall not your sorrow be turned into joy in the most emphatic sense?

And there is this to add to it, that the grand end which his death was meant to accomplish is all attained. What was that end? I may divide it into three parts.

It was the putting away of sin by the sacrifice of himself, and that is complete. He hath finished transgression, he hath made an end of sin; he hath taken the whole load of the sin of his elect and hurled it into the bottomless abyss; if it be searched for it shall not be found, yea, it

shall not be, saith the Lord. He hath put away our sin as far from us as the east is from the west, and he has risen again to prove that all for whom he died are justified in him.

A second purpose was the salvation of his chosen, and that salvation is secured. When he died and rose again the salvation of all that were in him was placed beyond all hazard. He hath redeemed us unto God by his blood by an effectual redemption. None shall be enslaved who were by him redeemed; none shall be left in sin or cast into hell whose names are graven on the palms of his hands. He has gone into glory, carrying their names upon his heart, and he stands pleading there for them, and therefore he is able to save them to the uttermost. "I will," saith he, "that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory," and that effectual plea secures their being with him and like him when the end shall be.

The grand object, however, of his death was the glory of God, and truly God is glorified in the death of his Son, beyond anything that was known before or since; for here the very heart of God is laid open to the inspection of all believing eyes—his justice and his love, his stern severity which will not pass by sin without atonement, and his boundless love that gives his best self, his darling from his bosom, that he may bleed and die in our stead:—

"Here depths of wisdom shine,
Which angels cannot trace;
The highest rank of cherubim
Still lost in wonder gaze."

Yes, O Christ of God, "it is finished." Thou hast done all thou didst intend to do, the whole of thy design is achieved, not one purpose hath failed, nor even one part of it fallen through, and therefore shall we not rejoice? The child is born; shall we not be glad? The travail would have been a subject for great grief had the mother died, or had the child perished in the birth: but now that all is over, and all is well, why should we remember any more the anguish? Jesus lives, and his great salvation makes glad the sons of men. Wherefore should we tune the mournful string and mourn sore like doves? No! Ring out the clarion, for the battle is fought and the victory is won for ever. *Victory, VICTORY, VICTORY!* His own right hand and his holy arm hath gotten him the victory! Though the champion died in the conflict, yet in his death he slew death and destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. Our glorious Champion has risen from his fall, for he could not be holden by the bands of death. He hath smitten his enemies, but, as for himself, he hath come up from the grave, he hath risen as from the heart of the sea. Let us exult like Israel at the Red Sea when Pharaoh was overthrown! With timbrel and dance let the daughters of Israel go forth to sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously, and utterly destroyed all our adversaries.

We have not yet completed this work of changing sorrow into joy till we notice that now the greatest possible blessings accrue to us, because he was made a curse for us. Through his death come pardon, reconciliation, access, acceptance: his blood "speaketh better things than that of Abel," and invokes all heaven's blessings upon our heads.

But Jesus is not dead. He is risen, and that resurrection brings justification, and the safeguard of his perpetual plea in heaven. It brings us his representative presence in glory, and the making all things ready for us in the many mansions: it brings us a share in that "all power which is given unto him in heaven and in earth," in the strength of which he bids us go and teach all nations, baptizing them into his sacred name. Beloved, Pentecost comes to us because Jesus went away from us; the gifts of the Holy Spirit—illuminating, comforting, quickening—the power to proclaim the word, and the might which attends that word, all have come to us because he is no longer with us, but through the regions of the dead has passed to reach his crown.

And now to-day we have this great joy again that because he died, there is a kingdom set up in the world, a kingdom which never can be moved, a kingdom whose power lies in weakness, and yet it is irresistible: a kingdom whose glory lies in suffering, and yet it cannot be crushed: a kingdom of love, a kingdom of unselfishness, a kingdom of kindness, truth, purity, holiness, and happiness. Jesus wears the imperial purple of a kingdom in which God loves men and men love God: having proved himself the prince of self-sacrificing love he is justly exalted to the throne amid the acclamations of all his saints. His kingdom, shapeless as it looks to carnal eyes, like a stone cut out of a mountain without hands, will, nevertheless, break all the kingdoms of this world to shivers in due time, and fill the whole earth. His kingdom will grow and extend till from a handful of corn upon the top of the mountains its fruit shall so increase that it shall shake like Lebanon; a kingdom which shall comprehend all ranks and conditions of men, men of all colours, of all lands and nations, encircling all even as the ocean surrounds many lands. The unsuffering kingdom of the suffering shepherd, inaugurated by his death, established by his resurrection, extended by the Pentecostal descent of the Holy Ghost, and secured by the eternal covenant, is hastening on. Every winged hour brings it nearer to its perfect manifestation. Yes, the kingdom comes: the kingdom whose foundation was laid in the blood of its King at Calvary. Happy are they who are helping it on, for when the Lord shall be revealed they also shall be manifested with him. The Chief among ten thousand and the ten thousand who were with him shall stand side by side in the day of victory, even as they stood side by side in the hour of strife. Then, indeed, our sorrow shall be turned into joy.

There we must leave the subject, only noticing this one fact, that that joy is right hearty joy. "Your hearts shall rejoice," said the Saviour: ours is no superficial mirth, but heart-deep bliss. That joy is also abiding joy. "Your joy no man taketh from you." No, nor devil either. Nor time nor eternity can rob us of it. At the foot of the cross there wells up a flashing, sparkling fountain of joy, which never can be dried up, but must flow on for ever; in summer and in winter shall it be, and none shall be able to keep us back from the living flood, but we shall drink to the full for ever and ever.

III. And, now, my last point is to be THE GENERAL PRINCIPLE INVOLVED IN THIS ONE PARTICULAR INSTANCE.

The general principle is this, that in connection with Christ you must expect to have sorrow. "You shall weep and lament, but the world

shall rejoice." But whatever sorrow you feel in connection with Jesus there is this consolation—the pangs are all birth-pangs, they are all the necessary preliminaries of an ever-increasing, abounding joy. Brethren, since you have come to know Christ you have felt a smarter grief on account of sin. Let it continue with you, for it is working holiness in you, and holiness is happiness. You have felt of late a keener sensibility on account of the sins of those around you, do not wish to be deprived of it, it will be the means of your loving them more, praying more for them, and seeking more their good, and you will be the better qualified to do them real service and to lead them to your Lord. Perhaps you have had to bear a little persecution, hard words, and the cold shoulder. Do not fret, for all this is needful to make you have fellowship with Christ's sufferings that you may know more of him and may become more like him. You sometimes see the cause of Christ as it were dead, and you are grieved about it, as well you may be. The enemy triumphs, false doctrine is advanced, Jesus seems to be crucified afresh, or hidden away in the grave, forgotten, as a dead man out of mind. It is well that you should feel this, but in that very feeling there should be the full persuasion that the truth of Christ cannot long be buried, but waits to rise again with power. Never did the gospel lie in the grave more than its three days. Never did a lion roar upon it but what it turned and rent the enemy, and found honey in its carcase in after days. Whenever truth seems to be repulsed, she does but draw back to take a more wondrous leap forward. As when the tide ebbs out very far, we expect it again to return in the fulness of its strength, so is it with the church. If we see a small fall in the tide we know that it will not rise very far, but when we see the stream sinking right away, and leaving the river-bed almost dry, we expect to see it roll in at flood tide till the banks overflow. Always look for the triumph of Christianity when others tell you it is defeated; expect to find in the very quarter where it is covered with most obloquy and shame, that there it will win its most glorious laurels. The truth's superlative victories follow upon its worst defeats. Have faith in God. You tell me you have that; then, saith your Master, "Ye believe in God, believe also in me." Believe in Christ, trust in him, rest in him, fight for him, labour for him, suffer for him, for he must conquer. Even now doth he sit as King upon the hill of Zion, and soon the heathen shall become his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth shall be his possession. Your sorrow shall be turned into joy in all these cases.

Whenever your sorrow is the result of your belonging to Christ always congratulate yourself upon it, since as the spring begetteth the summer so doth sorrow in connection with Christ bring forth to us joy in the Lord. By-and-by will come your last sorrow: unless the Lord should suddenly appear you will die. But be content to die. Look forward to it without the slightest alarm. Death is the gate of endless joy, and shall we dread to enter there? No, Jesus being with you, meet death joyfully, for to die is to burst the bonds of this death which everywhere surrounds us, and to enter into the true life of liberty and bliss. Even to the end sorrow shall be to you the birth-pang of your joy. Carry that thought with you and be always glad.

With one remark I finish. I will not dwell upon it, but leave it to

abide in the memories of those whom it concerns. I present it to the minds of all those who are not believers in Christ. Did you notice that the Lord said, "Ye shall weep and lament, *but the world shall rejoice*: ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy." Now, what is implied there to complete the sentence? Why, that the world's joy shall be turned into sorrow. Even so shall it be. There is not a pleasure which the ungodly man enjoys when he is indulging in sin but what will curdle into grief and be his sorrow for ever. Depend upon it that the wine of transgression will sour into the griping vinegar of remorse, which shall dissolve the rebel's soul. The sparks which now delight you shall kindle the flames of your eternal misery. Every sin, though sweet when it is like a green fig, is bitterness itself when it cometh to its ripeness. Woe unto you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you that now rejoice in sin, for ye shall gnash your teeth, and weep and wail because of that very Christ whom now you reject. All things will soon be turned upside down. Blessed are ye that mourn now, for ye shall be comforted, but woe unto you that are full this day, for ye shall hunger. The sun will soon be set for you that rejoice in sin. Sadness like a thick cloud is now descending to surround you eternally in its horrid gloom. Out of that cloud shall leap the flashes of eternal justice, and forth from it shall peal the thunder-claps of righteous condemnation. "Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup." The Lord deliver you from such a doom by leading you now to yield to Jesus, and to believe in his name. May he grant this prayer for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John xvi.

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"Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments."
—Psalm cix. 6.

ANY attempt to keep the law of God with the view of being saved thereby is sure to end in failure. So contrary is it to the express warnings of the divine Lawgiver, and so much does it run counter to the whole gospel, that he who ventures to seek justification by his own merits ought to be ashamed of his presumption. When God tells us that salvation is not by the works of the law, art thou not ashamed of trying to procure it by thy obedience to its precepts? When he declares that by the works of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight, art thou not ashamed to go and seek after justification where he tells thee it never can be found? When he over and over again declares that salvation is by faith, and that it is a matter of grace to be received, dost thou not blush for thyself that thou shouldst give the lie to God, and propound a righteousness of thine own conceit, in which thou hast vainly tried to keep up a respectable appearance, screening the palpable delinquencies of thy life under a thin veil of piety toward God and charity toward men? Eternal life is not to be earned by any trade you can carry on in works of the flesh; because, however estimable in the opinion of men, they are simply execrable in the sight of God. If a man seeks to keep the commandments of God in order that he may attain eternal life thereby, he will be ashamed and confounded. He had better at once renounce the folly of attempting so insane, so futile, so impossible a task as that of defending his own cause and justifying his own soul. But when a man is converted, when he has believed in Christ Jesus to the salvation of his soul, when he is justified by faith and his sin is blotted out, when he has obtained mercy, found grace in the eyes of the Lord, and entered into the rest of faith, because he knows that he is a saved man, then in keeping the precepts of the law he will gratify a strong inclination. In fact, it henceforth

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becomes his highest ambition to be obedient, and the great delight of his soul is to run in the ways of God's commandments out of gratitude for the great benefits he has received. And let it never be imagined that, because Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, there is therefore a complete removal of all moral constraints and restraints from Christian men. We are not under the law, but under grace, yet are we not lawless and libertine, since we have become servants of God and followers of Christ. Nay, but we are under another law—a law of another sort, which works upon us after another fashion. What if a man says, "I am free from the police, and the magistrate, and the judge, and the executioner," does it therefore follow that he is free from the rules of his father's house? Assuredly not. The child may be quite clear of the police court, but there is a rod at home. There is a father's smile; there is a father's frown. And though Christians shall never be so punished for their sins that they can come under condemnation, seeing they are clean delivered from that evil calamity by Christ, yet being children of God they come under another discipline—the discipline of his house and home—a discipline of chastisements not at all of a legal caste; for, however bitter the suffering it often entails, though he cause grief he will have compassion; the rebukes are sharp, but the retribution is not vindictive: and the Lord is wont to smile with approbation, to speak with commendation, and to bestow his compensations with liberal hand on those who seek his face, hearken to his voice, and do his bidding. When he has committed to us some service which he only could qualify us to discharge, he has often caused us to partake of the fruits in abundant joy. Now, I shall endeavour to bring out this principle while I am speaking upon our text. Those who are children of God should seek after universal obedience to the divine commands. They should have respect unto all the Lord's commandments. If they do so they will have a full requital; and this is the reward. "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments."

Two things, then, claim our attention: *the universality of believing obedience, and the excellence of its result.*

I. THE UNIVERSALITY OF BELIEVING OBEDIENCE is here highly commended.

The esteem in which we hold, and the tribute we pay to, all God's commandments is spoken of. Not some of his commandments, but all of them—not picking and choosing—paying attention to this, because it pleases me, and omitting that, because it is not equally pleasurable, but the careful, earnest respecting of all the statutes of God and the anxious endeavour to keep them all—this it is which challenges attention.

Therein is *great blessedness*. Turn to the psalm itself, which is far preferable to any reflections we could offer, inasmuch as the word of God must ever excel the word of man. There David says, "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord." Cometh this blessedness simply on those who are in the way, irrespective of their walk and conversation? Nay, but let them take heed lest they step aside and put their foot into the puddle and stain their garments. The persons who are truly blessed are the undefiled who so watch their

walk that they endeavour in everything to adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour, and in nothing to grieve the Spirit of God. There lies the blessedness, not in partial obedience, but in perfect obedience as far as it can be attained; not now and then, but ever and anon; not in some things, but in all things, as far as we are taught of the living God. The only way to avoid defilement is to have respect and pay deference to all the commandments of the Lord. Whether we observe it or not, there is never an omission of duty or a commission of fault that does not cast a stain upon the purity of conscience and the integrity of character. Wouldest thou wish to be spotted from head to foot, believer? I know thou wouldest not. If thou wouldest be blest, thou must be undefiled, and if thou wouldest be undefiled, there must be a universality about thy obedience—walking in all the commandments of the Lord.

To enjoy this beatitude a holy walking must become habitual. This sacred exercise is very different from sluggish piety. "Blessed are the undefiled in the way who walk in the law of the Lord." A man may sit down in the road without soiling his skin or fouling his apparel, but that is not enough. There must be progress—practical action—in the Christian life; and in order to blessedness we must be doing something for the Master. Slothfulness is not the way to blessedness. Nor can we serve the Lord in this active work except we labour in all things to mind his will, and walk according to his way. God is to be sought diligently by sincere souls. "Blessed are they that keep his testimonies and that seek him with the whole heart." Now, you cannot keep the testimonies, and know the doctrine, unless you have the will in full force and vigorous energy. It seems to be almost as inevitable as a law of nature that a man who is not sound in his life cannot be sound in his judgment. Wisdom will not long hold a seat in the head of that man who has yielded up his heart to folly. A pure theology and a loose morality will never blend. We have known men who thought themselves mightily orthodox indulge in many unseemly and profligate habits; in fact, they have made light of their own sins: but that boasted orthodoxy of theirs presently develops into some pernicious fallacy. Be assured of it, you cannot keep the testimonies unless you be willing to keep the precepts. Vaunt as ye may your knowledge of the *letter* of the Scriptures, you shall fail to be owned of God as his witnesses, unless there is the witness of the life as well as the witness of the lips. And how can the witness of the life be sincere unless we strive in all things to keep the statutes of the Lord? How can we be said to serve him with our whole heart if part of our heart goes after vanity—if we hug some favourite sin, or if we leave some known duty in abeyance, saying, "When we have a more convenient season we will attend to thee." No, the blessedness is to the undefiled. The blessedness is to the walkers in the way. The blessedness is to the keepers of the divine testimonies. The blessedness is to those that seek the Lord with their whole heart. So, you see, you must take care to have respect unto all the commandments if you are to get the blessedness of the Christian life.

If you will carefully notice the fourth verse of this psalm you will see that this keeping of *all the commandments* is itself a positive command

of God: "Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently." That is enough warrant for a Christian—"Thou hast commanded." Now, the command of God to his people is not, "Ye shall keep some of my commands, and walk in a measure according to my mind, and after my will." What father is there who will say to his children, "You must sometimes obey me. The rule of my house is that you may use your own discretion, and follow your own inclination as to which of my injunctions you obey and which you neglect; you can have your own way at times, if you will but occasionally yield to me in a few things." Such a father would be quite unworthy to be at the head of any household. Certainly our heavenly Father is not thus lax in his discipline. He has spoken to his children in tones of love. The law of his mouth has been given as a light to illuminate our path, and as a lamp to guide our feet. So palpable, then, is the divine benevolence that the more imperious his voice, the more interested we must be in heeding it. Does he say then—"Thou shalt keep my statutes and observe my ordinances"—doubt not for an instant that there is much profit in following the instructions closely, and great peril in disregarding them. And inasmuch as the authority of God goes with each command, with one precept as well as another, therefore should it be the object of the Christian that he should keep all the commands. He should make no choice, or selection, as to the words of the Lord, but take them all, and pray the Lord to bring him into conformity with every one of them.

That this is a meet and proper subject of prayer becomes very obvious; for in the next verse the psalmist exclaims, "Oh that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!"

Now, no man I think ever prayed God to grant him partial obedience. Did he ever pray, dare he ever pray, "O Lord, help me to overcome some of my sins, but not all. This day preserve me from some temptations, but allow me to indulge some of my propensities"? Did you ever pray, "O Lord, keep me, I pray thee, from great and open sins, but permit me in thine infinite mercy to enjoy certain private sins, that I am exceedingly fond of"? Such a prayer were worthier of a worshipper of the devil than of a worshipper of God. No; our heart renewed by grace craves to be perfectly set free from sin. We have not obtained it; we are pressing on towards it, but this, even now, is our desire, and our prayer. Hence you cannot wonder that in the text the believing man is spoken of as having respect unto all God's commandments, since, if it be a matter of prayer, it cannot be in respect to some of God's commandments, but he must pray that he may have respect to everyone of them.

Now, I want to come a little closer to details. What do we mean by having respect to all God's commandments? I reply that, whatever there is that the Lord has spoken in any part of his word we desire to hold in devout esteem, and to have respect to every utterance of his will. The law, as he gave it to Moses, is no longer to us the way of obtaining life, but it is still in the hands of Christ a most blessed rule of living. It is divided into two tablets, and our prayer is that we should keep them both, reverently observing them; that towards God our life should ever be obedient, truthful, adoring: that we should have

respect unto him in all our ways ; that we should lean upon him ; that we should depend upon him ; that then we should serve him, and devote ourselves wholly to him. To seek his glory, first and foremost, is the chief end of our being. We must not forget this. But then there follow six commands upon the other stone, which relate to men, and we must mind them ; for it were a poor thing to say, "I am devout towards God, but I care not to be just towards men." A devout thief would be a strange anomaly ; an adoring murderer were a singular incongruity ; a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ indulging in covetousness is a self-evident contradiction. No, he that loves God must love his neighbour as himself ; and I do trust our desire is that we may not fail in obedience to either of these tables, but may by the work of the Holy Spirit in us be wrought into an uprightness of conversation and character, both towards God and towards men. Some commands of God are highly spiritual, while others may be described rather as moral. Surely, to trust God is one of the grand commands. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" is a precept which we would never wittingly neglect. "'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding.'" "Cast your care on him." "Draw near unto him." All such spiritual exhortations as these relate to the life of the quickened believer. God has forbidden us to disregard, to despise, or to disparage any one of them. Oh that we may abound in all the graces of the Spirit, and be diligent in all the acts of our spiritual life. But we must not, therefore, forget or be negligent concerning morals, which some have accounted to be minor obligations, pretending to abound in prayer, but positively slothful in business, content to wait but not to work. They said that they were serving at the altar, but we saw that they were indolent enough in the shop. Christian men who stand up for the truth should take care not to be lax in their conduct when they are so wonderfully strict in their creed. Do not trifle with truth in speaking to your fellow man while you insist on respecting the truth of God. Can anything be more despicable than the pietists who prate much about the faithfulness of God's promises, but are not very particular about keeping their own promises ? They say that they will let you have an article home on Friday night, and you do not get it till the following Wednesday ; that is telling a falsehood. If you saw yourselves as others see you, though you might account yourselves spiritually true, you would know for a certainty that you were morally false. Little duties are almost too insignificant for such high-flying spiritual professors. They are brethren that can pray at a prayer-meeting, therefore they need not do an honest day's work for an honest day's wage. On the other hand, they can oppress the labourer in his wages because they mean to give a donation to the hospital. It will not do. In vain you pretend to be spiritual, and attend to spiritual duties, while you leave the commonplace morals in abeyance. Depend upon it, man, if you are not moral, you are not a disciple of Christ. It is all nonsense about your experience. If you occasionally get drunk, or if you now and then let fall an oath, or if in your business you would make twice two into five or three, according as your profit happens to run,—why, man, do not talk about being a Christian. Christ has nothing to do with you, at least no more to do with you than he had to do with

Judas Iscariot. You are very much in the same position. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." If without holiness, then much more without morality, can no man expect to see the face of God with acceptance. But, as true believers in our Lord, we do hope that he will enable us to have respect unto all God's commandments.

Some commandments specially concern the church. Every Christian should endeavour to discharge his duties towards his fellow Christians. There are also duties connected with the family, and every Christian should see that he does not let one of these kill the other. I did once know a man—I cannot tell you whether he is alive at this present moment—I knew him well; he used to go out into the villages with all the local preachers. He was a constant attendant at prayer-meetings—in fact, you never went to a public service connected with the church without seeing him—and he was out at tract society and missionary anniversaries, and every gathering of the sort; the only place where you never found him was at home with his boys. I had the misery to teach one of his boys. That boy died in drunkenness ere he had reached the age of manhood. Others of his sons were the pest of the town in which he lived. That man was eminently good in certain respects, doing a great deal for other people's families, but nothing for his own. Now, that will not do, brothers and sisters. That will never do. We must never bring to God as a sacrifice a duty smeared with the blood of another duty. That were an abomination. There is a balance and a proportion to be observed. "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments."

The works of the Christian life may be divided, if you like, into public and private. How zealous some individuals are in the discharge of public work. Anything that will be seen of men shall have their closest attention. But how about private work? We attend the prayer-meeting, but do we forsake the closet? We hear sermons, but do we read our Bibles alone? We attend public meetings, but do we have private communion with God? O beloved, there are two sets of duties, the outward and the inward. What though to outward observation we walk uprightly before God, and there be nothing about us that the human eye can detect as wrong, yet if the heart be not pure, if though the outside of the platter is washed the inside is full of filthiness, how far we are from perfection! These reflections ought to cause a world of self-examination while I press home the crucial words—"Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments"—those divine injunctions which concern the secret inward life, as well as those which have to do with our more outward and public carriage.

We sometimes divide Christian duties into greater and smaller. Of course they are all great; none are small except in their bearing upon others, and some things do appear to have less relative magnitude. Now, some people are remiss and careless about what they call petty, trivial matters, but the genuine lover of the Lord will show his love to his Master in bestowing much care upon little things. I know it is in a family the little things that bring discomfort, and the little things that give pleasure; and I believe in the family of God those who give diligent heed to the little things of the word usually bring much

comfort to their fellow Christians and great glory to God. At the same time, there were Pharisees of old who strained out gnats from their drink, but swallowed camels by their immoralities. There were those who tithed mint and anise and cummin, and yet neglected the weightier matters of the law. This must never occur with us. We must endeavour to have such a careful walk that we would not go an inch astray; and yet it is idle to talk about going an inch astray when we give ourselves license for a mile or two of wandering every now and then. God grant we may have grace to avoid small faults, while we strive to keep clear of great transgressions.

One other word I would like to say here. In the full sweep of our text there must be taken in duties unknown as well as known. "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments." There may be some of God's commandments that you do not know. Study the word of God in order that you may know them. "Well," says one, "but I am excused if I do not know them." Do you really think so? because, if so, the more ignorant a man is the safer he is from coming into condemnation; for, knowing little, he is under little obligation, according to such an estimation. But our understanding and knowledge are not the measure of our duty. The command of God is our sole standard. Conscience itself is not a trustworthy rule. If a man's conscience be unenlightened, he may be sinning, and reaping the ill consequences of his sin, not less surely because he is not conscious that his misfortunes are due to his folly rather than his fate. His conscience cannot be the standard. The standard is the law of God. Brother, I would not have thee live in daily neglect of a divine command which I am persuaded thou wouldst obey if thou didst know it. Hide not thyself behind a pillar, but come into the light, and take the word and read it, and always ask that God would be pleased to open your eyes to anything there you have not hitherto seen. You know you can wink very hard sometimes when you are reading the Bible. I should say that our friends in the Southern states of America, when they kept slaves, must have winked dreadfully hard when they were reading such a passage as this: "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also unto them likewise." And I could mention some other matters that concern English people, that would require a frequent putting the finger on the eye-ball, for fear too much light should come in. But be ye not such. Seek to let the word photograph itself upon your understanding, and then straightway when you know the divine will labour to carry it out in all particulars. Thus have I tried to show the range of this text.

But now notice that what is aimed at here is that the soul should pay respect unto all God's commandments—pay respect to them—love them, estimate them, value them, and thus pay respect to them all. I do not know whether you catch my thought, for I am afraid that I am putting it rather awkwardly. The commands of God are proportionate to one another. When an architect is about to erect a large edifice, say a cathedral, he has to make the height of the various proportions relative to each other. He grasps an idea of what the general effect is to be, so he does not throw out all his strength upon the nave, or the transept, or the chancel, or the spire, but he tries to make each part of the

magnificent pile assist and contribute to the general harmony of the entire structure. Now, it ought to be just so with the Christian life. "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments"—to the foundation commandments, striving to dig deep; to the high soaring commandments, seeking to rise into the utmost fellowship with God; to those commandments that need stern labour, like the rugged walls upon which much toil must be spent, and upon those which are a delight and a beauty, like the golden aureole windows that require fine taste and delicate skill. One would wish to do it all, to realize it all, to aim after a completeness of character, that we may be like to the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh that we were enamoured of this perfection, and were seeking after it! It becomes us, dear friends, who are believers in Christ, to set before us as our standard a perfect character, and we should aim to reach it, looking to have the mind and will of God for that model. That I may in all things do what God requires of me, and abstain from everything which he forbids me, should be the great object of my life. Be it my firm resolve, and my daily and hourly desire, that, by the power of his Spirit, I may attain this conformity to the divine purpose. I should endeavour with constant maintained persistency to get nearer and nearer to this obedience to every divine commandment. Every failure should cost me sorrow. Every mistake should lead me to chasten myself with penitence. Every time I err I should go to the blood again and ask to be washed, that no defilement may remain upon me.

II. Having thus expatiated upon this universal obedience, only a few minutes can be afforded for the reward, to wit—THE EXCELLENCY OF ITS RESULT, "Then shall I not be ashamed."

I suppose that means, first, that as sin is removed, shame is removed. Sin and shame came into this world together. Our first parents were naked and were not ashamed, but when in another sense they became naked, then they were ashamed. They had no sooner sinned against God than they were told that they were naked, and they hid themselves from the presence of the Most High. Unless sin gets to a high head, which it will not do in the believer, shame is sure always to go with sin. Excessive sin or habitual transgression at last kills shame and gives a harlot's forehead, so that the hardened culprit knows not how to blush. It is an awful thing when a man is no longer conscious of shame, but a more awful thing still when he comes to glory in his shame; for then his damnation is not far off. But as sin is cast out of the believer, shame is cast out of him in proportion, and it thence comes to pass that courage rises with a consciousness of rectitude. The man that has respect unto God's commands is no longer ashamed of men. He is not abashed by their scorn, or disconcerted by their ridicule. Let them say, "Oh, you are too precise." We should be very foolish to take that as a reproach. I remember once a man contemptuously calling me John Bunyan as I went down the street. I took off my hat to him, and felt rather flattered. I only wished I had been more like him. If anybody says to you, "Oh, you are a Methodist," take the imputation kindly. It is a most respectable name. Some of the grandest men that ever lived were Methodists. "Ah," but they will say, "you are one of the Presbyterians." Do not frown at the charge, but bow

courteously; for some grand witnesses for Christ have belonged to that goodly fellowship. "Ah," says the world, "you are one of those Puritans—you are one of those religious people." Yes, but you are not ashamed of that. They might as well have said, "You are a man worth £50,000 a year." Would you blush to own it? I dare say you would like it to be true. When anybody says, "Ah, there is one of the saints," ask him to prove his words. Tell him you only hope you will try to prove them yourself. There is nothing to be ashamed of in keeping God's commands.

Then, again, before men we shall not be ashamed of our profession. Well may some Christians be inclined to put their Christianity into the shade when they recollect how little credit they do to it; but when a man has respect unto all God's commands, he is not ashamed to say, "I am a Christian. Look me up and down and examine my conduct. I do not boast of it, but I know that I have sought honestly and sincerely to walk before God in righteousness." Or, when an accusation is brought against you falsely, meet it in the same spirit. Mayhap somebody will libel you. I will defy you to avoid it. If you were to live the life of the most irreproachable man of God you would not be safe from calumny. Was not God himself slandered, even in Paradise, by the serpent? But you need not be ashamed when you can appeal to God and feel that in all things you have endeavoured to keep his commands. Thrice is he armed that has his conscience clear. No armour of steel or mail can so well protect a man as to know that before God he has walked in guileless, blameless uprightness, and sought to do before the Lord that which is well pleasing in his sight. "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments."

This may likewise refer to that inward shame we sometimes feel when we examine ourselves, and pass our own conduct in review. Do not you ever, when reading a promise, look upon it as a very sweet promise made to God's children, though you hardly dare appropriate it to yourself? You feel ashamed. In fact, there are many gracious promises you never have yet been able to accept as your own. You have been afraid to take them. They were too rich, too ripe, too luscious fruit for you to adventure upon tasting: you thought they were intended for the favoured children, not for poor strangers like you. Now call to remembrance my text: "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments." There are some delightful privileges of the Christian that you have never yet ventured to seek; some high doctrines that you have scarcely been able to believe. Dear friend, have respect unto all his commandments; for, perhaps, your fear, your doubt, your hesitancy, your want of assurance may have arisen from your want of a careful walk before God; and when the Holy Spirit has enabled you to be holy, he will enable you by full assurance to grasp the rich things of the covenant.

Now, may I not be speaking to some who have been ashamed of attempting their obvious duty. It is your duty to tell your experience sometimes to others, but you have blushed at the very thought. I know why. It was because you thought of some inconsistency which, if they knew, would disparage your testimony and make you appear very faulty in their eyes. Ah, "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I

have respect unto all thy commandments." You have not dared to address even the smallest congregation yet though you can speak very well upon secular topics. Why is that? Is that because your walk is not as close with God as it should be? "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments."

Perhaps, my brother, you may be a minister, and yet sometimes you may almost falter in stating some grand doctrinal truth. Why is that, brother? Is there something at the back that I cannot guess—that I would not mention if I could—which weakens your testimony? Yet you will not be ashamed when you have respect unto all God's commandments. How can we stand to admonish the unrighteous if we are not living righteous lives ourselves? How can we be able, like Nathan, to say, "Thou art the man," if we are conscious that the person rebuked could turn round and point at our lives and say, "See what you do." No, brethren, the servants of God that are to have courage in doing duty for their Master must pray to be the undefiled in the way, they must walk in the law of the Lord; and though at the very best, should they reach the highest point, they will still lie low before God and be humble in his presence, yet they will not be ashamed when they can feel that they have, in all integrity, walked before the Lord, and can say, like the prophet of old, "Whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you. Witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed." But if they could not impugn him, it gives the man grace not to be ashamed. So will it be in the time of trial, too. I admire Job, notwithstanding the testiness he seemed to have, and I wonder who would not be testy when he was covered with sore boils from head to foot: yet it was a grand thing to be able to say, "O God, thou knowest I am not wicked"; and he could appeal to the Eternal as his vindicator, because the charges brought against him were not true; he had not sinned against his God in the way in which they said. Though he was not perfect in his nature, yet he was pure in heart; he was sincere in his disposition, and blameless in his outward carriage, so that he could defy them to prove any one of the insinuations that they hurled at his integrity. This helped him to triumph. It was the very backbone of his patience. And what satisfaction will it supply when our course is reaching its close, and we face the hour of our departure, if no dark clouds hang over our retrospect of life. Let God's grace enable you and me to live godly lives, we shall find then our evidences clear. Though we shall not ever rely upon any works of righteousness that we have achieved, or any character of holiness that we have acquired, but shall ever rest as much in Christ as we did when at first we cast our sinful souls on him for mercy, yet still it will be sweet to look back upon a life that has been spent in the service of God, and to exchange this service below for the nobler service of his courts above.

And when our course is finished, and we are gathered to our fathers, do you not think it will be well to leave an unclouded reputation behind? Did you ever notice the painful contrast between the record concerning one and another of the good kings of Judah? Take for example

Amaziah and Hezekiah. Of Amaziah it is said, "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, yet *not* like David his father. Howbeit the high places were not taken away : as yet the people did sacrifice and burnt incense on the high places." There was no such qualification to the tribute offered to Hezekiah's memory. "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did. He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made : for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it : and he called it Nehushtan. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel ; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him." So, brethren and sisters, I pray it may be with each and all of us, though we may not hold any such exalted position as the kings of Judah, yet let it be our desire and our aim to be "sincere and without offence till the day of Christ."

Once more, and I have done. "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments."

"Then I shall not be ashamed before God." There is such a thing as a child of God being very much ashamed in the presence of his Father. He does not doubt that he is a child, but yet he feels ashamed. Is it not so with your own children? They know that they are your children, and they know that you love them, but still they are ashamed, because they have been doing something which grieves you, and so they do not seek your company. They get away from father. Father has looked very angrily at them. And yet you never say, "Oh, you are not your father's child, because you have done wrong, and your father will turn you out of the family." They are never apprehensive of your casting them off. Oh no ; they are Calvinistic enough to know that they are not threatened with such a punishment, but at the same time they are fully aware—and it is enough to distress them—that their father is vexed, and that he frowns, so they keep out of his way. Now, remember, if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin." But we must walk in the light, or else we shall not have fellowship with God. Sin will mar and break up that fellowship. Sin will make thee leave off communing, or else communing will make thee leave off sinning. The two things are not consistent with each other. I, of course, mean not by sinning those sins of infirmity which we commit unconsciously, but I mean a general habit of sinning, to which our wilfulness or our negligence contribute. No rebellion or remissness can be tolerated in those who are living with God. Have you ever noticed two boys that want some indulgence, and one of them says, "Ask father for so-and-so. Ask father to let us have a holiday." The other says, "John, you ask him." "No," says John, "I cannot ask him, you ask him." "Why should the younger one ask?" "Well," John says, "you know I have offended father, and though of course he loves me, yet I do not think it is quite the time for me to go and ask of him any great favour. You go and ask for us both." Have you not felt like that when engaged in prayer sometimes when you have not been walking with God as you should? You could pray for forgiveness ; you could pray for common mercies ; but as for any great favour

or special mercy, you have felt ashamed at such times to ask, and you have been glad for some brother to open his mouth a little wider than you dared, and ask for the church and you some great blessing. O Lord, thy servant knows what it is to draw near to thy mercy-seat, but he feels as if he was not on such terms with thee as usual, and that he cannot offer prayers and intercessions with that sense of liberty he has often enjoyed. There are other times when God meets us with the kisses of his love, and says, "Ask what thou wilt, and it shall be given to thee." It is grand praying with us then. "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments." I shall not plead my obedience before thee. Nay, verily; but I shall plead the blood and righteousness of Christ, and this I shall do with all the greater boldness because my heart is sprinkled from an evil conscience: and that same Spirit which has wrought obedience in me will work in me the spirit of adoption, and he that taught me to listen to thy voice will teach me so to speak that thou wilt listen to my voice, and an answer of peace shall come to me. May God bless you, comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work, for Jesus's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm cxix. 1—16.

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A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.”—Mark xi. 22.

THIS exhortation stands in connection with the miracle of the withering of the fig tree that was clad with leaves but bare no fruit. The peculiarity of the parable calls for a few words of explanation before we proceed to enforce the moral appended to it. To many readers it seems strange and inconsistent that, as it was not the time of figs, our Lord should have expected to find figs upon the tree at all. They wonder how it was that he should blame the fig tree for not having figs when the time of figs was not yet come. But it is because we do not live in the land of fig trees that we do not understand this; for according to the natural order of production the fig-fruit precedes the foliage. The fig tree first of all puts forth its figs, at the end of the shoots—the little knobs beginning to form in the early spring, and the figs becoming very fairly developed before any leaves appear—so that if a fig tree has leaves upon it, it ought to have figs in a considerable state of ripeness. This fig tree, at a time when no figs were expected, and far less any leaves, seemed to have outstripped all its fellow fig trees; to have gone far ahead of them; to have been in advance of its own responsibilities as a fig tree; to have exceeded all the demands of the season; to have reached a state of supernatural fruit-bearing which no other fig tree had dreamed of reaching. There were leaves. The Saviour went up, and finding the leaves which ought to have denoted figs in a considerable state of ripeness he glanced around, but finding no single fig to justify the large pretence, he said, “Henceforth let no fruit grow on thee for ever.” You know that occasionally trees do put on leaf at abnormal times. There is a famous oak in the New Forest which usually has well-developed leaves upon it about Christmas, when winter reigns on every side, and “dead the vegetable kingdom lies.” There is a pretty superstition about it, as though the tree thrust forth its sudden honours at the birth of the great Lord. I have seen

the tree, and it seems very strange that it should take to leaf-bearing when there is not a leaf throughout the forest anywhere else. This fig tree in like manner, for some reason or other, had got into leaf at a time when it ought not. If it did get into leaf it ought to have figs, but it had leaves and no figs. As such it becomes a fit and proper emblem of such a man as we sometimes meet with, who vaunts a righteousness he cannot verify; seems more conspicuously pious in his character than he could reasonably have been expected to be; makes a show of piety that is altogether premature; gives signs of maturity before the season; professes much, though he yields nothing to corroborate it:—a prodigy of self-conceit. He does not say he is absolutely perfect, but it needs very fine optics to distinguish the line. He outstrips all his fellows. His talk is something marvellous. His creed is sounder, his conscience more sensitive, his conduct more sanctimonious, and his standard in estimating others more censorious than the rest of the community. You wonder at it till you come near to him, and then you find it is all talk, tinsel, and trumpery. “Nothing but leaves”; no real virtue, but a verdant show thereof. Ay, I have known decent morality outraged by such monstrous duplicity. All the leafage and foliage of a godly life; all the death and corruption of a graceless libertinism! Those round about him were ashamed to find themselves so inferior in their attainments, till presently the suddenness with which he withered astounded them more than the rapidity of his growth. There was nothing in it. The old proverb has it, “Great cry and little wool.” Great cry, indeed, for holier voices are silenced by it; and no wool at all to repay the shearer, “Nothing but leaves.” Now, if any man is withered it is such a man as that. One thing I have noticed in watching over a large church, that some brethren who have seemed too good to live have turned out much too bad for us to want them to live very long. Such have been so pure, so white, so spotless, so stainless, so precise, so exact, so velvet-mouthed, so oily, so full of sugar, so hyper-holy in their hypocrisy, that it seemed cruel to feel inward qualms when you were near them. Yet under a thin layer of this hollow pretension they have been so deficient in all spiritual life and reality and sincerity, that when we found them out, we could not help feeling a burning indignation in our own soul that men could go so far in lying unto the Holy Ghost. One does not wonder that Ananias and Sapphira fell dead, or that the fig tree was blasted that had so many leaves and no fruit. We have seen the like thing happen to men, and we have not wondered. We have only thought how righteously God has unmasked them, and exposed their hideous vices to the execration even of the world, which though it lieth in the wicked one has yet some sense of scorn at a religious lie.

Now, our Saviour performed this miracle by way of parable, not that he cared for figs, or was angry because there were none; but that it furnished him with an opportunity of instructing his disciples. This was an object lesson. We never learn so well as from something we can actually see with our eyes. Jesus did this that they might see, and that their minds might be impressed with what they saw. The main impression upon the mind of Peter, and others, seems to have been the extraordinary power of Christ. One morning their Lord said, “Henceforth

let no fruit grow on thee for ever"; and the next day when they passed that way they found the fig tree withered, even from the roots—not simply all its shoots gone, but according to Mark, in the twentieth verse, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots, or totally destroyed. It stood a wreck of a tree, the precise opposite of what it had seemed to be some four-and-twenty hours before. They were struck with the power of Christ's word: at the simple fiat of his mouth the doom had fallen on the tree. He had not touched the tree that we know of: he simply spoke, its bloom was past, its doom had come. Now, our Lord did not go on to open up the parable to them, but perceiving the impression it made on their minds in one direction he aimed at still further engraving on their souls the moral which had been conveyed to their senses: so he went on to speak about the great power of God that they were wondering at, and to tell them that they could have that power, that they could wield it, and that they might exert it as he did; and he practically told them how they could get that power, and go forth girded with it.

I. Our first observation, in order to bring out this vein of thought, shall be that **IT IS GOOD FOR US TO OBSERVE THE POWER OF GOD.**

These disciples saw the power of Christ, which is the power of God, in the withering of a fig tree. We do not see miracles now. We do not look for signs and wonders to supply the credentials and the seal of faith. The works of God in nature are, if rightly understood, testimonies to the eternal power and Godhead, at once simple and sublime. Perhaps, under some aspects, they convey higher lessons than miracles. We ought, I think, to have our eyes open constantly to see the power of God in renewing the face of the earth. I like to observe it in the seasons. What a wonderful power was that which, on a sudden, called up all sleeping bulbs and flowers from their graves; and caused that which had been black soil suddenly to blossom into a golden garden, or to bloom into beds bespangled with many colours. Have you not seen lone places in the wood and nooks among the trees so glorious in colour that it seemed as though the Lord had rent pieces of the robe of the sky and flung them down among the trees in the wood? We have seen the hyacinths on a sudden in their deepest azure standing where all before had been black mould or sere leaf. We see it every year, but it is a marvellous thing, and we might stand and say, "How soon hath the winter passed away! How speedily hath earth put on her youth again!" See you no power of God in all this? These creations and resurrections of spring—are they nothing? And now at this season of the year when the leaves are falling all around us, though the trees are not withering away, how rapidly they are undergoing their wonderful process of disrobing. You passed by a tree the other day which was green, and you delighted to be beneath its foliage; and now in the setting sun of this afternoon it seemed as though it were blazing with golden fire: every leaf had turned yellow by the touch of autumn. How has God wrought all this? Silently and quietly, without sound of trumpet, from year to year these miracles of nature proceed, of which I am speaking very roughly now; but he that looks into them, and studies them, shall be filled with amazement at the extraordinary power of God. This world has been going round the sun making its revolutions. Who could hold it to its pathway but the Most High? Each day it revolves

and gives us the delightful vicissitude of day and night : it is the Lord that moves the world on its axis. We do not think at all adequately of the mighty power of God which is continually going forth. The creation of blood out of water by the plague of Egypt astonishes us a great deal more than does the revolution of the world, and yet this is by far the more amazing thing of the two.

It does us good, beloved friends, to stand sometimes at night and look up to the starry heavens and think what a God he is that calls all of them by name, leads them out in marching order so that not one of them fails, and sustains each one of those celestial orbs in its place throughout the ages. Marvellous are the works of God in nature. Can you read about Vesuvius beginning to pour forth its fires, or of earthquakes in divers places shaking the mountains to their bases, and making the strongest works of men to rock and reel, without a sense of reverential awe? Can you be in a storm at sea, can you tremble while each timber starts as the waves beat upon the vessel, without feeling that this is a great God whom we serve? I invite you to think of the greatness, the majestic grandeur of God in nature, because the God of nature is the God of grace, and the God that rules on high, and thunders according to his pleasure, is the God whom we call Father, and who has taken us into his family that we may be his sons and daughters. Though we do not see fig trees withered away, yet often ought we to stand in holy wonder and say, "Great God, how wonderful are thy works!"

Now, if you turn your eye from nature to providence, which I invite you to do, you will observe stupendous examples of the great power of God. This withering of the fig tree has been repeated ten thousand times on a grand scale. I will only remind you of what has happened in our own day. A few years ago slavery seemed to have struck its roots into the soil of the Southern States. Its branches ran over the wall: the Northern States were bound to return a fugitive slave. How quickly has that fig tree withered away! Slavery has gone, blessed be God, for ever. And there treads not now on American soil a man of any colour who is a slave. Across yonder channel frowned the great empire of Napoleon. It looked as if it were very mighty. It spread itself like a green bay tree. It was the main support of the papacy; but how quickly has that fig tree withered away! Over yonder, in Italy, there were a number of petty principalities with paltry tyrants crushing down the people. God raised up an honest man, who came forward as the champion of the oppressed, and how speedily did those little fig leaves fall. There stood the man of sin with his temporal power, and he was master of his own domains, and chiefly of the city of Rome, but how soon has that fig tree withered away. One after another revolutions have occurred, and events have transpired in our own day which prove that the Lord is very great in power. All through history the ages bear their record that whenever an institution has sprung up that has brought forth no good fruit just at the very time when it was fullest of leaf, when everybody said, "Now we may expect fruit from it," and when it was supposed to be impossible that it should pass away, just then has the Lord spoken, and its hour of doom has come. One word from him, and how speedily has this fig tree withered

away! All providence is full of it. He that reads history looking for providences needs not turn two pages over without finding instances. He shall see the hand of God here and there, and there and there again, permitting for awhile the growth of evil, but then speedily sweeping it away. So shall every system which defies his laws prove that its prosperity is the precursor of its utter destruction. It flowers and flourishes but to droop and die; to die just in its prime. While we stand trembling and astonished at its spread, so thick its leaves, so palpable its vitality, at that very moment we hear the powerful voice of Christ and see the inevitable result in the withering away of that which was in the prime of vigour.

Now, as we have opportunity to watch the power of God, let us always be ready to observe it; not, however, with vacant wonderment, nor with idle gossip to exclaim to one another, "How extraordinary!" Although the works of God are meet subjects for adoring wonder, yet when we remember who he is and what he is, there is a sense in which we may well cease to wonder or to be startled, as if our poor philosophy must for ever reckon as strange phenomena the tokens of his presence, the proofs of his agency, and the impress of his hand. You know the story of the good woman who, on being told of some signal answers to prayer which had been received, was asked, "Is it not wonderful?" and she simply replied, "No, not at all; it is just like him. That is the way of him." And so when God puts away withered fig trees, and when he shows his power in other ways in his divine providence, it is wonderful for us to contemplate, and yet it is not wonderful for him to perform. He breaketh the bow and cutteth the spear in sunder. He burneth the chariot in the fire and he bids us be still, and know that he is God. He will be exalted in the earth. It has been the way of him from the first, and it will be the way of him still.

We ought to watch these works of power that we may feel that this power is altogether engaged upon our side. If we be indeed upon the side of God, if his grace has reconciled us to him, if we live now to promote his glory, if we are under his keeping and the guardian care of the Lord Jesus, then all the power that makes an earthquake will be put forth to shake heaven and earth sooner than we shall perish. All the power that shows itself in providence shall be put forth to deliver us sooner than we shall famish. Our place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: our bread shall be given us and our water shall be sure. The mighty God, Jehovah is his name, has pledged his omnipotence for the advance and the victory of his people, and stand they shall and win the day.

That is my first point for our evening's meditation: it is good to observe the power of God.

II. God has called his people to WORKS WHICH NEED ALL THAT POWER.

Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us this practically, when he says, "Have faith in God, for verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith." A Christian is a miracle. He is a mass of miracles. When he gets to

heaven he will be a miracle of miracles. His story in the telling thereof will fill all heaven with enthusiasm, so marvellous is the work of God in the heirs of salvation. It is no small thing to be a soldier of the cross—a follower of the Lamb. Now, to-night, dear souls, if the Lord Jesus Christ by his Spirit should call any one of you to come to him, you would, perhaps, feel immediately the deepest anxiety in your heart. Methinks I hear you say, “If I come and trust him, yet how shall I be saved, for see the difficulties that lie in my way? I see before me the vast mountain of my past sin. How can I come to Christ? Surely this alp of transgression must hide him from me.” Have faith in God, dear friend, and God’s power will be put forth to move this mountain, yea, Christ has moved it by his precious death. “Ay,” says the poor heart, “but I feel such a mountain of despair, I cannot hope. I think I have sinned beyond grace.” Have faith in God and thou shalt see this mountain of doubt and despair all swept away, and thou shalt joy in him that blots out thy sin like a cloud and thy transgressions like a thick cloud. “Ah,” says the soul, “but I seem so cold, so heavy, so dead. I do not feel as earnest and eager as I should. There is nought in me that is good.” Have faith in God’s power to help thee in this, and thou shalt find thy lethargy and languor give place to energy and vigour, and thy cold heart shall be thawed in the rivers of repentance. “Oh,” says one, “but I want everything. I am far off from God, as far as I can be. There are impassable barriers between me and God.” Yes, but have thou faith in God. Do thou but believe in his fatherly love and grace, his goodness, and faithfulness: do but trust Christ, and rely on the great Father’s love in Jesus Christ, and thou shalt find that the mountains which appal thee will melt away, and no longer impede thee.

I know what has happened to thee. Thy fig tree has been withered down to the roots. How full of leaves it used to be! Thou wast a fine fellow once. If thou didst not bring forth any fruit to God, yet what fair promises thou didst make—what grand resolutions! What a fine self-righteousness thou hadst, but the power of God’s will has already withered it down to the roots. Now, the selfsame power of his gospel by the Spirit will take up all the mountains that stand between thee and God and cast them into the depths of the sea, and thou shalt rejoice in him.

God calls the coming sinner, then, to duties and obligations so far beyond his own natural capacity that it requires all the power of God to enable him to fulfil them. Even when bidden to repent and believe and come to Christ, it needs the Godhead to help him to do that, but the Godhead will enable him, and so he shall receive grace for obedience to the faith. Have faith in God, then, and faint not by reason of discouragements.

But after we have come to Christ we still find it no easy task to continue pressing on to God. You that have believed in him and are saved, do you not often cry out, “O weak and erring mortal that I am! How shall I ever reach to perfection? How can I get rid of sin, that haunts my imagination and vexes my heart? What heaven of bliss can I know unless my soul is purified from every stain?” Most true it is that there can be no such thing as perfect happiness till there is perfect

holiness, and yet by faith the believer looks for both. "But," do I hear you say, "first, my ignorance is in the way?" Have faith in God, and thou shalt be taught of him, and that mountain of darkness shall disappear. "Oh, but then there is my old corruption in the way, and that comes in between me and every advance in grace." Have faith in God and thou shalt find he will take away the stony heart out of thy flesh and fill thee with virtue and vitality through believing. "Oh, but the trials and temptations of each day, how shall I stand against them?" Thou canst not stand against them alone. They are far too much for thee, but have faith in God, and then fierce as those temptations may be, thou shalt be able to resist, for his power is able to hold thee up. Though a legion of devils at once should tempt thee, have faith in God, and they shall be put to the rout. Thou shalt have sufficient grace to bear thee through.

"Ay," but says another, "you do not know my trial." No, my dear friend, and you do not know mine, but both you and I may know this, that He who measured out the trial, for they are all measured and weighed to the last pennyweight, knows how to strengthen us so that we can bear them. We shall be able to say to the mountains of trial, "Depart," as truly as we bade the fruitless fig tree "be dried up." Rise, worm Jacob, and thresh the mountains and beat them small; yea, turn them into chaff and winnow them, and the wind shall carry them away. Only trust thou in the eternal power and godhead, and there is nothing between here and heaven that need give thee any fear. If we are without God we shall stumble at a straw, but if God be with us, who can be against us? Even if our life should be protracted to an advanced old age, should our bones be full of pain, and our flesh infected with a thousand painful infirmities, even though we should spend years upon a weary bed, with poverty as well as pain to afflict us, he that hath faith in God shall sing aloud upon his bed and praise the Lord because the power of God rests upon him. You are not called to be parade soldiers, to exhibit your regimentals and your fine feathers. You are called to fight. You must fight if you would reign. Do not mistake it; you are called to work miracles—moral miracles, spiritual miracles. You are called to do great wonders between here and heaven. You see your calling, brethren, and you will see, if you see aright, that nothing but a power divine can help you to accomplish it.

Now, if this be true in respect to our own spiritual life, I am sure it is so in trying to win the souls of others to Christ. The man who brings a soul to Christ achieves a result which no genius or skill of the creature could compass. The power which God puts upon a man to make him the means of turning a sinner from darkness to light has no parallel. If a man could tell me that he stopped Niagara at a word, I would not envy him his power if God will only allow me to stop a sinner in his mad career of sin. If a creature could put his finger on Vesuvius and quench its flame, I would not at all regret that I had no such power if I might but be the means of staying a blasphemer, and teaching him to pray. This spiritual power is the greatest power imaginable, and the most to be desired. If any of us aim to be useful, we cannot succeed unless we have this divine power, for without omnipotent spiritual help we can produce no spiritual result. You can

read a sermon or preach a sermon, or hear your children read in your Sunday-school class without any help from God, but then nothing will come of it. If there is to be living preaching and living teaching that really brings souls to Jesus Christ, the work must all be wrought in the power of the Holy Ghost from first to last. You see your calling then, brethren. You must have that power which speaks to fig trees and they wither—ay, a power sufficient to speak to a mountain and pluck it up by its roots, for nothing short of this will fit you for your work.

Take the larger scale for a minute and think of it. We are all called to try and extend the Redeemer's kingdom, and as Christians we are greatly concerned for the progress of the church and truth of God. I am sure in these evil days there is not one of us that can look upon the signs of the times without considerable sorrow. I hope it is not because I am growing older that I take a gloomier view of things than I did some years ago : it is not my eyes, but I do actually see superstition much more rampant than it was. That particularly sweet fig tree of ritualism has spread its boughs amazingly. And then there is the very specious fig tree of scepticism that seems to overshadow a considerable portion of the professing church of Christ. Well, now, what is to be done? Nothing is to be done except as the text tells us—"Have faith in God." And when we have faith in God we must speak with fidelity and with authority too : we must show our faith by the testimony we bear ; and the word of God that comes out of faithful lips shall roll like thunder and flash like lightning, and strike with electric force. So the old effect it always had on these leafy fruitless fig trees will be repeated : it shall make them to wither away. If you have ever read the history of sceptical thought in Germany—not that I recommend you to do so, for it is a sore labour and a weariness of spirit—but if you have ever waded through any of these histories of philosophy as I have myself, you will doubtless have observed a thought rising up like a cloud full of portents, and covering the Fatherland with its fantastic shadows till the people are led to see everything in a new light, or under a fresh colouring. They give the poet, the essayist, and the critic of the new cloud region credit for inspiration, and all who abide under that shadow are written down as infallible. But how insecure the reign of human wisdom ! In about five-and-twenty years you could buy all the books of that day at the price of waste paper, for a new philosophy has meanwhile sprung up, a fresh system which has rendered all that preceded it obsolete. The *savans* are in ecstasy. They shout "Eureka !" and sneer contemptuously at all who refrain from echoing their cry. Wait a little while, and another meteor will attract their gaze, another ephemeral glowworm will glimmer in the darkness. I have read of a gourd "which came up in a night and perished in a night," but the cedars of Lebanon grow slowly and endure longer. "How soon has this fig tree withered away !" Thus have I thought, and so have I said, as I have read one after another the various systems of nonsense that they call philosophy and metaphysics. "How soon has this fig tree withered away !" Now, in the lives of even some of the younger folks here you might have seen in England different systems of unbelief coming up in different quarters, under which the thinkers of the age (as they call themselves), or the triflers of the hour

(as we might better style them), have sought shelter. At one time we were all wrong because of some wonderful discovery of old bones. Geology had upset us. Then some other science was brought to the front. One has lived to see a number of little scares. The fig trees have come up with a vast show of foliage without any fruit. In looking back at them we can say, "How soon has this fig tree vanished away." And, as to the present pretensions, whatever they may be, we have only to wait a little while with confidence in God, and we shall see these fruitless fig trees also wither away. Yes, and if there be systems in the world which seem more enduring, colossal as the Alps, with foundations deep as hell, we have still but to exercise faith enough and cry to God loudly enough, and fling ourselves upon Omnipotence boldly enough, and then to speak, and in the speaking of the everlasting gospel we shall see these mountain systems plucked up by the roots and cast into the midst of the sea. There is the point: we must have divine strength to do it.

III. Now, our Saviour shows us the **CONNECTING LINK BETWEEN THE DIVINE POWER AND OUR WORK.**

How are we to acquire this power? We believe that God can do all things; we have seen something of the greatness of his power; how can we be girded with it? Here is the answer: "Have faith in God." It is to be by faith; that is, trust, reliance, belief. It must be in God. Our faith must not be partly in God and partly in something else, but faith in God. And it is literally, "*Have the faith of God*"—the faith which is wrought in us by God, and sustained by God, for that is the only faith that is worth the having.

Have the faith of God. "Oh, but this is a very small thing," says one. It is. It is a child's instinct to trust his father, but it is the rarest grace in the world to trust our Father who is in heaven. "When the Son of man cometh shall he find faith on the earth?" If anybody could find it he could. He knows where it is, for he is the author, the giver, and the nourisher of faith. Yet there is so little of it in culture that if he himself searched for it he would not find many fields in which it grows, or many hearts in which it thrives. Why, some of us have faith in him whereby we are saved from this present evil world. How shocked at ourselves we have reason to be in respect to the little faith we have in him for the furtherance of his own work, and how our heart sinks under our own daily trials! He has given us justifying faith, but our faith still is a faith the weakness of which should make us humble ourselves before him. Doubt God! How monstrous it sounds; how foolish it appears; how impossible it seems. To an experienced Christian, at first sight, it really seems incredible that any disciple of Jesus should doubt God. You, my dear brother, that have been fed and nourished all your life long by singular providences—you whose life is so remarkable, that if its incidents were all written people would look on them as a romance; you who have seen his arm made bare on your behalf many times; you who have oft been constrained to say, still has my life new wonders seen—do you doubt him? How can it be? Alas! alas! Is not this the fault, the grievous, crying sin of many of the children of God? Hence our Lord puts it thus. He not only speaks of the faith of God, but he says, "Have it; have it. Have faith in

God. Have it handy. Have it about you. Have it for daily use. Carry it with you." Some of you have got a good anchor somewhere, but you left it at home when the storm came. You have faith somewhere, but you do not seem to exercise it just at the time when faith is required. "Have faith in God." He does not tell you how much. There is no need to prescribe any limit. Have unlimited faith in God; have daily faith in God; have continual, perpetual, abounding faith in God. "Have faith in God." This is the connecting link between our weakness and the divine strength, by which we are made strong.

Have faith in God about every purpose and every peril that may arise. You saw how the fig tree withered away. Have faith about that. You have seen it. Now, have faith about mountains. Do not think that God's power is limited to withering fig trees. Have faith about things of magnitude and things minute, but more particularly about the things that at this moment distress you. When you feel that you could believe God about everything save and except one particular matter that just now frets your mind and breaks your peace, you evidently misjudge your own capacity for faith. You ought to measure its strength by the influence it exerts upon you under your present trial. O my sister, have faith in God about that sickening little infant at home. Your heart is sad that the Lord's will in this must be done, but he will strengthen you to bear it. Have faith, too, about those simple family matters which are causing you so much irritation. You have been praying about them, now commit your cause to God, and have faith that he will grant your request. "Oh, but there is a matter of deep moment harassing my very soul, which I should not like to mention to anybody," say you. Have faith about it and mention it to your Lord. Do not go about and make mischief by talking of it, but have faith about it. "Ay, but I am out of employment," says a poor man over yonder, "and I am getting hardly pressed." Dear brother, are you a true believer? Have faith about that now. I know you will say to me that I do not know your trial. No, I do not; but you do not know some troubles I have had! and if you were to tell me to have faith in God about them I would thank you for the exhortation, for that is the only way I have of getting over them. And, dear brother, it is the only way you find of being extricated from your dilemmas. What a mass of troubles are represented by this assembled multitude! If we could empty them out what a heap they would be; and yet, if the living God is trusted, how the heap all vanishes! What does it matter? The burden is all gone when you have once left it to him. May the Lord the Holy Spirit help each one of us to have faith in God about the present difficulty, whether it is fig tree or whether it is mountain. I do not know what some of you do who have no God to trust to; some of you who are very poor and have to suffer a good deal in this life, and have no hope of the world to come. Ah, poor souls, the Lord have mercy upon you. Some of you seem to go through fire and water here, and yet you have no heaven in prospect, no hope in the world to come. Oh, see to it. May God grant you to have faith in Christ, that so there shall be no mountain between you and God, but you shall be with him where he is when your time comes to depart.

IV. Now, I conclude with my fourth point, which is THE CONNECTING LINK BETWEEN THE DIVINE POWER AND OURSELVES.

To use a very simple figure, you remember how Franklin, when he knew there was an electric fluid in the cloud, sped his kite and brought down the lightning. Well now, there is the everlasting power of God up yonder, and I must learn to let my faith get up into the clouds to bring down the divine power to me. If I have faith enough I can have any quantity of power. "According to your faith be it unto you." If you are weak it is because your faith is not a good conductor between you and the eternal strength. If you had better faith, is it possible to judge how strong you might be? There is no telling what a man might be able to accomplish if his faith were to increase with the occasion. In Samson we see what physical strength came to in a man who had confidence in God; for that man Samson, though faulty in almost every point, had such confidence in God as hardly anybody ever had. There were a thousand Philistines, and they shouted against him, but what did that matter to that great big child Samson when the Spirit of the Lord came mightily on him? He said, "With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men." O glorious faith! And so ought we to feel. "I am nothing. I am nobody, yet God is with me, and on I go, dauntless and undismayed." If earth be all in arms abroad it matters not if God be with us. When there is a minority of one, and that one is God, we are in the majority directly, for God is all, and all the people in the world are nothing before him.

The Lord gives us some hints how to use our faith. First, we must use it to expel every remaining doubt. "Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith." God will not bless the speaking of that man who is full of doubts. Get rid of the doubts. The gospel of this present half of the nineteenth century is "Doubt." It does not say, "And thou shalt be saved," because it sees no immediate need of being saved. The gospel preached in numbers of our places of worship is—"Doubt, doubt. Do not be as those nearly extinct Puritans that believe in the inspiration of the Bible, and hold to old-fashioned, exploded doctrines. Be a man, and doubt." They will doubt themselves into a pretty scrape before long. Some of them are doubting till their chapels are empty; they are scaring their people away from them, as naturally they would, for doubt is a ghastly apparition.

But, dear brethren, you and I have to do the very opposite of this. We have to find out every lingering doubt, and draw it out and drive it away. A doubt! When a man is about to strike a blow in faith it is a doubt which paralyses him. A doubt! Why even a little doubt is like a small stone in a traveller's shoe: it lames him. It is a very little thing, but he had better spend a week in picking it out than go on with it there. Believer, thou must get doubt right out of thee, for until thou believest thou wilt never travel well to heaven, or be strong in the Lord. Only fancy Martin Luther agitated with doubts as he rode into Worms! Not quite sure about justification by faith

when answering for his life! Agitated with doubts when he was carrying his life in his hand to confront the powers of the world in the name of God. Doubt would have ruined him. Let us chase the spirit of unbelief away. The Lord help us to do so, and to be filled with faith.

The next hint the Saviour gives us is to be much in prayer, because it is by prayer that faith exercises itself unto God. "What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them and ye shall have them." Much prayer, but of a believing sort, should be offered by simple, trustful disciples, for the cry of faith which is true prayer touches the heart of the great Father, and he is prompt to grant his children their desires.

But one other hint. That is, we must see to it that we are purged of what would effectually prevent prayer being heard. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear my prayer." Would you have the power of God to gird you, you must get rid of all malice from your heart. You must forgive your brother. All selfishness and uncharitableness must be eradicated from your breast; for else the Lord cannot trust you with power. If you had despotic power linked with a pitiless disposition you would not only curse a leafless fig tree, but you would get cursing anything and everything that was contrary to your own likes. If you were endued with all manner of power, it would be no mercy to you, but an infinite misery, unless you were also partakers of the mind of Christ. Unless you have his heart of infinite purity and inimitable benevolence, power would be a most dangerous thing to trust you with. The Lord will only trust his children with power in proportion as they know his will and strive to do it. When they become completely like him, their very prayers which were sown in weakness shall be raised in power. But sin is awfully debilitating: it weakens, enervates, and utterly prostrates a man. Any kind of sin, if it be tolerated in the will—if there be a hankering and a lusting after self—if we think that power when acquired may be used for our own pleasure, profit, or honour, the power will not come, it cannot possibly be conferred on such terms. Thou shalt move no mountain from its place till, first of all, the mountain of thy selfishness is cast into the sea. O Lord, purge thy vessels and then fill them. Cleanse the instruments from rust, and then use them. Here we are now before thee. Blessed be thy name, thou hast saved us. Now make us fit to be serviceable in thy cause and kingdom, poor unworthy things as we are, and thou shalt have honour of us and by us for ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Mark xi.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—679, 533.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

WAKE UP! WAKE UP!

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"That, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."—Romans xiii. 11.

THIS exhortation, as you will readily perceive, is not addressed to the ungodly. These words are not spoken to those who are dead in sin, but to those who are alive unto God, though somewhat given to slumber. There are many expostulations and admonitions which do appeal to the wilful and wicked, to the indifferent and unbelieving, to those who err and are out of the way, but this is not one of them. Here we have a special charge to disciples of Jesus who know the time, and also know that their salvation draweth nigh. They are represented as being asleep and needing to awake from their present sluggishness; but they are not described as those who had ceased to be Christians, or whose salvation was in jeopardy. Though it is admitted that it is high time for them to awake out of sleep, their salvation is never questioned, but on the contrary they are reminded that now it is nearer than when they believed. The tone and tenor of this call to circumspection suggest to us that when we address the Lord's people and find occasion to rebuke and reprove them we should never insinuate that they are likely to be banished from the household of faith, or to be cast away from the presence of God, or to be treated as reprobates. Even if we feel convinced that they are asleep, and that they must be aroused, we ought not to denounce them with railing accusations, or threaten them with the wailings of the lost and the doom of unquenchable fire. You would not be pleased if any one should touch your child with a horsewhip; nor will the Lord allow us to strike his chosen with the rod of the wicked. Legal thunders are not intended for justified saints.

"The terrors of law and of God
With us can have nothing to do,
Our Saviour's obedience and blood
Hide all our transgressions from view."

Even if the saints' hearts are dull, their eyes heavy, and they are evidently fast asleep, we are not warranted in raising a false alarm. It is not for us to tell the heirs of salvation to awake because they are in danger of the wrath to come, for they are in no such danger; that is past and gone. Rather let us remind them that their salvation is nearer than when they believed, and so stir them up to watchfulness and activity by appropriate motives. The whip is for the slave, not for the child. The dread of punishment is for the condemned, not for the justified. The fear of wrath is not for those who are "accepted in the beloved," but for those who reject the Saviour and put from them the eternal mercy of God. While, then, I endeavour to speak frankly and faithfully to the Lord's people, I shall try to avoid anything like a legal tone. I would fain talk to God's children as their Father in heaven would have them talked to, somewhat sharply, perhaps, but still without a trace of the threatening which belongs to the ungodly, but not to those who are saved in the Lord.

From the connection it appears to me that Paul had in his mind's-eye a kind of sleepy state into which God's people may fall with regard to others; and upon that state of slumber we shall speak to-night.

I. Looking at the text in its true bearings, this is the lesson—**SOME PROFESSING CHRISTIANS SEEM TO BE ALTOGETHER IN A DEAD SLEEP WITH REGARD TO OTHERS.**

It is all very well to take a passage of Scripture, isolate it from the context, and use it as the motto of a sermon; but it is evidently not the natural and fair way of treating the word of God. You may do so for the most part with tolerable safety, for God's truth, even when it is broken up into little pieces, still retains its purity and perfection like certain crystals, which, however much they may be subdivided, always bear the same crystalline form. So true in every particle and detail is the revelation of God, that though you should take it up and dash it to pieces, yet every little fragment will bear the original impress. But this is no excuse for treating the Scriptures in an unjustifiable manner instead of expounding them according to the rules of common sense. Texts ought always to be handled with a reverential deference to the mind of the divine Spirit who indited them. When we attempt to rivet your attention on a verse or the fraction of a verse of the Bible we desire you also to be scrupulously attentive to the affinities in which it stands. If any of my published sermons should in any instance appear to violate this rule, you will bear me witness that it has been my constant habit throughout all my ministry among you to read and open up, as best I could, the whole chapter from which I have selected a few words as the motto of my discourse. I have honestly endeavoured to give you the special mind of the Spirit either in the exposition or in the sermon.

Now, you will see that the connection here is this. Paul has been bidding us to pay attention to relative duties. As citizens, he bids us render honour to magistrates, and to those who are in authority, and to pay all lawful dues and customs, and the like, telling us that we are to owe no man anything except to "love one another;" and then he shows us that the law of love is the abstract and the essence of that great table of the law which concerns a man's relation to his neighbours. He goes on to exhort us to keep that law of love, to manifest love more

and more; and, when he has done so, he interjects this sentence, "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep." Now, I gather that he means that many Christians are in a sleepy state with reference to the law of love, with reference to their obligations to others. Beloved friends, true godliness makes a man look to himself. It commences by convincing him of his own sin, and by leading him personally to lay hold on Christ by faith that in his blood he may find salvation. It then makes the man feel his personal obligations and his individual responsibilities. It sets him free from many of the yokes with which his fellow men would load him, and bids him obey his own conscience before his God, to be a law unto himself and to stand and walk as before the Most High, judging righteous judgment as to the Lord's will, and not basely bending to evil at the advice and persuasion of other men. I would to God we could get some Christians, some professed Christians, to be a little more independent; but so many of them are like the rotten houses of which we have not a few in this neighbourhood; they could not stand alone, they must keep together, for they prop one another up. If you were to pull down one of the houses in some of our streets, they must all fall; and so there are sets of Christian professors that lean one upon another, upon the custom of their set and sect, and church and community. They have never dared to study Scripture for themselves and follow it, nor have they ever tried to form their own personal conscientious convictions. One of the first works of the Holy Spirit is to make the man look at home, and to consider the condition of his own soul.

When the Spirit of God has made a man thus to stand on his own footing before God, and to feel his personality, there springs up a danger that such a man may say, "I shall henceforth keep myself to myself. My chief business will be indoor work, to see after the rightness of my own spirit and to keep myself prospering before the Lord. Other people must see to themselves, and I must see to myself." The principle of individuality might be thus pushed to an extreme, till what at first was necessary grit in the spiritual constitution, making the man truly a man, may be so unduly increased that he becomes at last an unkind, ungenerous, cruel, selfish thing, deprived of the best part of his humanity. Thus, then, we are brought back to this, that albeit every man must give an account of himself before God, and must personally be born again, and personally be reconciled to God by Jesus Christ, yet, "no man liveth to himself," nor was he ever meant to do so. No man can compass the ends of life by drawing a little line around himself upon the ground. No man can fulfil his calling as a Christian by seeking the welfare of his wife and family only, for these are only a sort of greater self. There are outgoing lines of life that bind us not only with some men, but, in fact, with all humanity; so that, if we did but know it, the thought of one brain, the utterance of one lip, the movement of one pair of hands does in its measure influence the whole human race to some degree and will do so till time shall be no more. We are placed, therefore, in a most solemn position; and it is with regard to this that it is high time that we should awake out of sleep.

Into what a deep slumber some professing Christians have fallen! How utterly insensible they are to the sins and sorrows of those around

them. They believe God has a people, and they are very glad he has, as far as they are capable of being glad of anything that does not concern themselves. But, "the world lieth in the wicked one," and multitudes are perishing. They are sorry it is so, that is to say, they go the length of saying they are sorry. It does not cause them any sleepless nights, it does not disturb their digestion, it in no way interferes with their comfort, for they do not seem to think that it has anything to do with them. I know some that are in such a sleep who drug themselves with almost as much regularity as they feed themselves. They take that great and precious truth of the divine sovereignty, and turn it to a most detestable use; for they say, "What is to be will be, and the Lord's purpose will be fulfilled. There will be some saved and others lost." All this is said as coolly as if they were talking of a wasp's nest. As for those that are lost! They dare not injure their logic by indulging a little mournful emotion. Were their minister to weep over the lost, as Jesus wept over Jerusalem, they would say he was unsound—a duty-faith man, certainly, and, probably, an Arminian. And they would straightway quit him, and think that he could not have really received the mind of the Spirit of God. Yet, in the judgment of all who think aright, one of the finest traits in a Christian's character is the deep sorrow which he feels over souls that are being lost and the great longing of his own soul that men would turn unto God and find peace through Jesus Christ. O sirs, I fear there are many professors in a deep sleep as to whether others are going to heaven or to hell! The drunkenness that is around them they look upon as a matter of course. The blasphemy which greets their ears does not chill their blood: they say it is very usual and very shocking. The Sabbath breaking they take to be a kind of necessary evil. The rejection of Christ by men they look upon as no sin at all, and they even quarrel and cavil with those who think that sinners are blameworthy in rejecting the Son of God, the Saviour of sinners.

I trust that many of these are God's people, and, if they be, it is high time that they should awake out of such a sleep as that, so unlike Christ, so alien to the spirit of love, so contrary to the mind which God would have his Spirit work in all his people. Alas! that they should have sunk into so dead a sleep.

Others there are, dear friends, who are prone to be overtaken with an oft-recurring sleep. I know a brother who often takes forty winks in the day-time: you may nudge him, and he will wake and listen to you, but he goes to sleep again in a few minutes if you let him alone. He will attend to you with much pleasure if you pull his coat again; but he soon returns to his dozing. Who can blame the sleeper when it is a question of infirmity or sheer exhaustion? I never like to blame people too hastily when they go to sleep in a place of worship, for I remember thinking rather hardly of a brother, who went to sleep one Sunday morning under my sermon; but when I found that he had been sitting up two nights with a sick wife and had been doing a full day's work besides, then I was sorry enough to have thought a hard thought of a worthy man. I rather wondered, when I understood the case, whether I should have been able to come to worship at all. Well, without blaming any of you, then, for the weakness of the flesh, I take this sleepy habit

to be a fit illustration of the state in which some Christians are to be found. They go to sleep and then they wake up for a little ; they have fits and starts of wakefulness, and then off to sleep again they drop. Does this describe you, dear friend? At that missionary meeting you woke up when you heard the cry of the perishing heathen. You wanted to get out into the street at once and tell poor sinners about Christ ; and you did empty your pockets into the plate before you left the building. Have you cared much about China or India since then, though you know that there are millions of people,—millions dying for lack of knowledge? They have not troubled you much, have they, since that missionary meeting? Perhaps to-night I shall pull your coat tail a little and you will be awake again, and you will be very much concerned, and you will pray earnestly for your neighbours and your ungodly friends. But, I fear, you will soon go to sleep again. You have gone back to your slumbers so many times before that now it is “sleeping made easy.” Could not your ministers lodge a grievous complaint against you for this? You do get on fire with love for souls when the discourse is specially arousing, but then after the sermon is over, and the week of special services has ended, you go to sleep again. Many Sunday-school teachers there are of that kind. They do sometimes talk to their children about their souls with tears in their eyes ; and then, again, their ardour evaporates, and they get through their duties in little better form than merely reading the Scriptures, and explaining them in a dry, dull fashion. My slumbering brethren, you could be awake. You might be awake! For sometimes you are so. There are times when your whole soul seems on fire. If anybody had spoken of you then, they would have said, “What a fine man that is! What love he has for Christ! What concern for the souls of men! He ought to be sent forth as a missionary at once.” Wait till you see him asleep! He can sleep very soundly! In fact, he is as great at sleeping as at waking. He can descend into depths of stupidity and indifference as naturally as he just now rose into heights of fervour and enthusiasm. Yes, there are many such, and I would say to any brothers and sisters who are conscious of a propensity in that direction—is it not high time that you, that I, that any, that all of us should awake out of sleep?

There are those, again, who fall into a kind of somnambulistic state. They are doing a good deal for their Lord and Master, but yet they are asleep. If we judged them by their outward actions we should think they were wide awake, and they do what they do very well. But have you never seen a person who has a habit of walking in his sleep? It is a strange sight. Persons have been known to walk along giddy heights safely enough when they have been fast asleep, where they would not have thought of venturing if they had been wide awake. And we have known, sometimes, professors going on very safely, carefully, exactly, in positions where others have fallen, and we have admired their prudence and discretion, and attributed it to the grace of God, whereas in part it has been attributable to the fact that they were spiritually asleep all the time. It is very possible to walk long and far and yet remain asleep ; it is very possible to appear very devout when, indeed, you are very sleepy. It is very possible to sing hymns when you are not awake to the sense ; yes, and it is very probable that you will betray your absence

of mind by sitting down at the last verse, although there is going to be a chorus afterwards. You know it is coming, but your part of the worship is performed so mechanically that you dropped down in your pews as a mere matter of habit, and then were all in a flurry to be up again. I have detected many of you doing it. I have felt convinced that you were virtually asleep at the time, not really drinking in the spirit of the hymn, or else it would not have happened. It is very easy to hear sermons and to be asleep all the while, at least with one ear open and one eye, but the major part of the faculties of the soul still steeped in slumber. And you can keep on teaching in the Sunday-school, pay your religious contributions punctually, maintain the habit of family prayer, and even your private devotions may not be wholly neglected, and yet you may be a somnambulist. All these duties may be done with a sort of sleep-walking life and action, and not at all with the life of a thoroughly wakeful man. Oh, I would like to hear a man speak about heaven who was altogether awake to it. I would like to hear a man preach about hell who was aroused to the true pitch. It would make your very hair stand on end, as you should hear how he told of the terrors of the wrath to come. It would make every drop of blood dance in your veins to hear a man speak of Christ who is all on fire with love divine, and all awake with divine delight in him. But that slumber is apt to come over the most lively minister. Who will not confess it? Oh, if you have ever read a chapter of the Bible when your soul has been all awake, how the promises have glowed and burned. How bright have they been like "the terrible crystal." But too often we have nodded over the Bible, nodded over the promises, nodded over the precepts, till there seemed neither life nor power in them. The life was there, but we were asleep.

Well, dear friends, I must add, and then I shall have said enough about sleep, that a very large number of us are half asleep. Whether there is one man alive that is spiritually awake all over, I do not know. Such a man as Rutherford, who loved his Lord so that he scarcely ever thought of anything but Jesus—that was a man all awake. Such a man as Mr. Whitefield again, preaching his very heart out morning, noon, and night with a seraphic eloquence—that was a man wide awake. There have been many such; I trust there is a remnant of such now. But the most of us are painfully conscious that we are waking, and need greatly to be more awake still. O God, make us to feel the solemn weight of those eternal things in which we believe. Thou hast saved us, make us awake to feel from what thou hast saved us, and by whom thou hast saved us, and to what thou hast saved us, and what the privileges are which belong to us now that we are saved. Oh, when I think how trivial are the things of time, and how all-important are the unseen realities of eternity, I cannot but again conclude that most of us are nothing more than about half awake as to the things of God, and if it be so it is high time that we awake out of sleep.

II. Now, in the second place, I want to occupy a few minutes by saying, that whereas many believers are asleep **IT IS HIGH TIME THAT THEY SHOULD AWAKE.** And why high time that they should be awake?

Why, first, because what right have we who are believers to be asleep at all? The Lord has saved us—saved us from death—saved us from the sleep

which is the first cousin to death—saved us from indifference—saved us from unbelief—saved us from hardheartedness—saved us from carelessness. Well, now, if the Lord has done this for us, what business have we to be in a sleepy state? When the five wise virgins went out to meet the bridegroom, and took their lamps with them, what right had they to be asleep? I can very well understand those sleeping who had no oil in the vessels with their lamps, because when their lamps went out they would be in the dark, and darkness suggests sleep, but those who had their lamps well trimmed, should they go asleep in the light? Those that had the oil, should they go to sleep while the oil was illuminating them? They needed to be awake to put the oil into the lamp. Besides, they had come out to meet the bridegroom. Could they meet him asleep? When he should come, would it be fit that he should find those who attended his wedding all asleep in a row, insulting his dignity and treating his glory with scorn? Child of God, thou art expecting Christ soon to come, and he may come to-night, or he may, if he pleases, delay his coming, but why, oh why, dost thou think of sleeping? What is there congruous to thy character—what is there suitable to thy expectations—in thy sleep? If then thou hast caught thyself having a sinful nap, bestir thyself, and ask the Holy Spirit to arouse thee, for since thou hast no right to sleep at all it is high time that thou shouldst awake out of sleep.

It is high time because a great many opportunities have already slipped away. I address myself to some of you who have been converted, say these ten years. And what have you done for Christ? You are saved—we are not going to question that; and your glorious salvation is nearer than when you believed. But what have you done during these many years? You have been eating the fat and drinking the sweet, but have you fed the hungry? Have you brought in the wandering? You have enjoyed the means of grace, you tell me. And is this all you were created for—to enjoy, ay, even to enjoy good things? Have you not asked yourself the question “What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits toward me?” Dear friend, if you have been saved a week, and you have done nothing for Christ during that week, you have already wasted more than enough time in having lived through seven fruitless days. Let the time past suffice you to have suffered opportunities to pass before your door unwelcomed.

But some professors are growing old; grey hairs are upon them. How long hast thou been a Christian? Hast thou loved the Lord these thirty years, and done so little? Or what, if though thou be an old man, and yet only a babe in grace? That is worse still, is it not? As to all the past, is thine account grievously unprofitable?—a wilderness where there might have been a garden, a desert where there might have been a fruitful field? Can you endure the painful retrospect? Oh, when I look back, one of the joys of my life is to have been converted to God while yet a child, and to have begun to preach the name of Jesus when still a youth, and yet though that be a subject for joy, I find abundant reason for accusing myself of wasting opportunities of service. If it be so with me, though for years I have lived unto the Lord, I am sure it must be so with many of my Master's servants; so let me say to them, by all those wasted opportunities, it must be high time for you to awake out of sleep. Time is hastening on, my brethren; each flying moment holds another

by the heel. Life rushes on as a rapid stream; it bears us along swiftly and silently. If you are going to do something it must be done very soon, young man. You are not a child now. Your sun has not quite reached its zenith, but it is rising high. It may go down ere it is noon. If something is to be accomplished before you die, get at it, man, get at it, or your life will be a failure. And you of middle life. Well, you are in the very strength and prime of your days. If God is to be glorified by you, and souls brought to Christ by you, I urge you, in the name of all that is reasonable, get at it, and lay to, for if you do not work now, when will you? When the days of weakness come, and those that look out of the windows are darkened, you will say, "I am too old." Oh, now, let the prime of your days be the Lord's! Or, has the evening of life descended upon you? Are the shadows lengthening, and does strength fail? Brother, sister, thou art saved. Thou wouldest not like to go to heaven, wouldest thou, without glorifying Christ somewhat here below? Then do it now. All hand, all heart, all mind, all thought must be given to the present pressing duty. Thou hast such a little while before thee—so scanty an evening is left thee—surely it should be all spent with the utmost diligence in the Master's service. "Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep."

Do you not see that it is high time to awake out of sleep, because there were so many people that had a claim upon us, who are beyond our power now, even if we do wake? Have you ever felt the sadness of neglecting to visit a person who was ill until you heard that he was dead? You said to yourself, "Why did I not go and speak at least one word of warning before that soul was gone into eternity?" Death is sweeping away multitudes of our neighbours and friends, and it is high time that we were diligent in seeking those that remain, if we are to do them any good, for when that knell is tolling, and that grave is closing, our regrets will be useless to the departed, but, at the same time, bitter to ourselves. Many are passing away from us and from the sphere of our influence in the common course of providence. Your children, for instance. They were little. Some of you have little children still. Well, they will not be little long. Already, mother, that boy is beginning to show a good deal of independence of spirit; he will not even now listen to you as he did, and you feel a little grieved at it. It will be more so soon. If you do not bend the twig when it is a twig, you will not do much with it when it gets to be a tree. We let our children slip from under our fingers while they are plastic. We forget to mould them, and then they get into manhood, and become less amenable to our counsels and our cautions, and we grieve that we did not do something more to train them up in the way they should go. Now is your time, mother, God helping you. Now is your time, father. Parents, avail yourselves of your opportunities; and remember that good is done by constant watching and by small degrees. And your servants, too. Cannot you recollect some servants that lived with you, and you always meant to talk to them about their souls, and to pray with them? But they left you, and they were gone before you had commenced to bless them. They are very worldly now. Perhaps if you were to trace them out you would find they were Christless, and you would hear them say that they once lived with a religious mistress, with a pious master, and they hoped

they would never do so again, for it was the most miserable time they ever had, "and whatever religion master might have had, he kept it all pretty well to himself, for they never heard much of it." "Oh," you say, "I hope they do not say so." I hope so too, but I have known such things said. And it is very possible that men and women may be so asleep about the souls of those round about them that opportunities which were in their way may be sliding away never to return. I believe that if we were awake we might often avail ourselves of opportunities to speak to men who otherwise hold themselves aloof from any religious conversation. There is a time with almost every man when conscience is awake. Perhaps he is saddened by affliction, is cowed by adversity: then he will respect as friendly what he might otherwise resent as insulting. The most hardened do at some season or other become amenable to reproof, or exhortation, or direction. If you are ready, take a shot at him, and you will have him. But, if not at that moment, you may never have another occasion of getting the truth where the man will feel it. We ought to be ready in a minute. Those who would shoot the running deer have to be very, very clever in taking sight and seizing the moment while it is running by, and those that would take running souls—and the most of our fellow-countrymen are just such—must be sharp sighted and quick witted. They only run by us, and we must have them in a minute or else they will have gone beyond our reach. We cannot do this unless we are awakened out of our sleep. God grant we may be so awakened.

Meanwhile, dear friends, there is this reason why we should be awake; we have plenty of enemies that are awake if we are not. You may sleep, but you cannot induce the devil to close his eyes. Protestantism may slumber, but I will warrant you Jesuitism never does. You may see evangelicals asleep, but you will not find ritualists slumbering. The prince of the power of the air keeps his servants well up to their work. Is it not a strange thing that the servants of the devil serve him so enthusiastically, while the servants of the Lord often serve him at a poor, cold, dead-alive rate. Oh, may the Lord quicken us! If we could with a glance see the activities of the servants of Satan we should be astonished at our own sluggishness. It is while men sleep that the enemy comes and sows tares among the wheat, and it is because men sleep that the tares are sown in the Lord's field. If we were more awake, the adversary would not have the opportunity of scattering his evil grain.

It is high time that we awake out of sleep, for it is daylight. The sun has risen. Will you sleep now? We are getting far into the gospel dispensation. Can you sleep still? It is time that we were awake, for our Lord was awake. What wakefulness he exhibited! How did his eyes stream with tears over perishing Jerusalem! He was all heart. The zeal of God's house consumed him. Ought it not to consume us? We ought to be awake, for our own day may be over within an hour or two. The preacher may be delivering his last sermon. You may go home to-night to offer the last prayer at the family altar which you will ever utter on earth. You shall open shop to-morrow morning for the last time. Should not these possibilities bestir you? How near, how very near, is the ultimatum of every man here present. Have you fixed upon

a grand purpose, brother? Fulfil it. You have scarcely time to get through it, therefore waste not an hour. Have you been planning? Leave off planning and get to executing your work. You have been speaking about being generous. Be generous. You have been talking about being spiritually minded. Leave off talk, and get at it, man. You have intended to be consecrated to God. Come, do not squabble about consecration and about perfectionism, but be ye consecrated and be ye perfect. Go in for the highest possible form of devotion and service. We have lived long enough at this poor half-and-half rate. If there be any higher platform, the Lord lift us up to it. If there be a way of living, spirit, soul, and body, wholly, unreservedly devoted every moment to the Lord, oh for his Spirit to conduct us into such a state. This is our ambition. After this we aspire. We dare not say, as some do, that we have gained it, for if we did we believe that we should give evidence that we knew not what it was, or else we should not talk so loftily. But brethren, while the Master's personal coming may be so near, and while his coming to us by death may be nearer still, it is high time that we awoke out of sleep.

III. I close with a third remark. IT IS WORTH WHILE WAKING, FOR THERE IS SOMETHING WORTH WAKING FOR.

He says, that it is high time that we wake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. As I already remarked, he does not say, "for if you do not wake you will be lost." Neither does he say, "You Christian people, if you remain in this dull state, will perish without hope." No, that is the threatening of the law, and suits the tongue of Moses, but Jesus does not talk so. No, no, he sets his servant speaking to us in a gospel tone, "Now is your salvation nearer than when you believed."

Undoubtedly, dear brother, it is nearer in order of time. How long is it since you believed? Ten years? You are ten years nearer heaven, then. Your salvation, that is, your ultimate, complete salvation, the display and manifestation of your complete deliverance from evil, from sin, from death, from hell, is nearer by so many years than when you believed. Some of us are five-and-twenty years nearer heaven than we were. Ought we not to be more awake? The farther we are off from heaven, the less we may feel its influence; but we are getting so much nearer that we ought to be increasingly sensitive to its mysterious spell. Oh, to feel more of its power! We shall soon be in heaven, brothers. We shall soon be there, sisters. Do not let us go to sleep now with the golden gate right before us, and Jesus waiting to admit us. Nearer glory! Is it not good argument for being more alive unto God?

Some of you are sixty years nearer to heaven than you were. You have been in Christ now more than half a century. Well, well, brother, are you not glad of it? Would you like to live those sixty years over again? Would you like to go back and tread that weary road a second time, clambering again the hill Difficulty, and sliding down again into the Valley of Humiliation. Would you wish to march a second time through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and into Giant Despair's castle? "No," say you; and you need not fear the return journey, for you shall not go back again. Rejoice that you are so much nearer heaven in the matter of time. Therefore, keep wide awake, and looking out for it. When little children have been taken from their inland homes to the sea

they have been very eager to see the ocean, and yet they have been ready to go to sleep as they approached the end of the journey. They have never seen the sea before, but mother says, "Wake up, children, you are coming near the sea." Soul, soul, soul, we have never seen heaven, but we are getting nearer. Let us keep awake. Jerusalem, my happy home, shall I enter thy sacred precincts sleeping? Shall I come to the last hill, from which I am to take a view of thy glittering vanes and golden streets, and shall I be half asleep within view of them? Come, no, no, no; my heart, wake up! Heart, wake up! thou art getting nearer home. "A day's march nearer home" thou hast come even this day, be ashamed to slumber.

And, if we are getting nearer in point of time, I hope we are getting nearer in point of *preparation*. Christ is preparing heaven for us, and his Spirit is preparing us for heaven. Well, then, if we are getting more ready for heaven, we ought to be more awake, for sleepiness is not the state of heavenly spirits. Heaven is the home of activity, not the dormitory of unconsciousness. When our bodies shall have been raised from the dead, they shall enjoy life and energy, and be for ever free from fatigue and sluggishness. Let us, as we are getting ready for celestial company, be fuller of life and fuller of energy.

More ready for heaven, then reap, reap, reap with stronger arm. Do another man's work, if thou canst, as well as thine own. Thou hast nearly accomplished thy life's labour, therefore throw all thy strength into that little which remaineth. So near heaven; then pluck another brand out of the burning. If thou art more fit for heaven thou hast more love, more grace, more pity; then reach out both hands to bring another poor soul to Christ. If the golden gate shall soon be open to thee, and thou shalt be shut in for ever in the blest place of rest, be sure to show others the way to that gate, that thou enter not alone. Your salvation is nearer than when you believed, therefore do something more to prove that you are ready for it.

And, lastly, as your salvation is nearer than when you believed, let us hope your realization of it is more clear. Have you tried to realize the glory to be revealed? Within a short time you will be with Jesus—

"Far from this world of grief and sin,
With God eternally shut in."

Your head will wear a crown, your hand shall grasp the palm of victory; you, even you, shall walk the golden streets, and see that face which is brighter than the sun. It may be that to-night you will be made free of the New Jerusalem: to-night you may leave that narrow room and that hard bed, the abode of poverty and care, and you may be away up where they keep eternal sabbath, and the congregations never break up. You will be there, brother, even you. There is a crown in glory which no head can wear but yours. You will be there. Well, now, it really seems to me that, if I can realize that in so short a time my eternal salvation shall be consummated, and I, even I, shall be among the blood-washed throng, to see my Saviour's face, I cannot any longer neglect a single opportunity of serving my Master—cannot any longer let poor souls go down to hell without endeavouring to save them—cannot any longer neglect prayer—neglect opportunities of usefulness, or live otherwise than

as a man should live who has his foot upon the doorstep of heaven and his finger on the latch. What manner of persons ought ye to be to whom heaven is guaranteed by promise, and to whom it has been sealed by blood to be your special heritage,—the portion of a people whom every moment brings nearer to eternal felicity? What manner of persons ought ye to be? May the Spirit of God make you to be just that now, and he shall have praise for ever. Amen.

I have said nothing to the unconverted because I have been admonishing *you* to say something to them. If you will catch the spirit of my text, you will each one feel for them and begin to speak. But if I were to wrench the text from its connection, and apply it to the unconverted, what a sledge hammer it would be! Shall I read the text as I should have to read it if it spoke to the unregenerate? It runs to the Christian, "Now is your salvation nearer than when ye believed." Oh, ye unconverted men, must I read the text as it would have to run if it were written to you? "It is high time that you should awake out of sleep, for now is your damnation nearer than when you first heard the gospel and rejected it." Take heed, take heed. God grant you grace to take heed and to believe in Christ. Amen and Amen.

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7—14 ; xiv.

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Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE BEST BELOVED.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Yea, he is altogether lovely.”—Solomon’s Song v. 16.

No words can ever express the gratitude we owe to Him who loved us even when we were dead in trespasses and sins: the *love* of Jesus is unutterably precious and worthy of daily praise. No songs can ever fitly celebrate the triumphs of that salvation which he wrought single-handed on our behalf: the *work* of Jesus is glorious beyond compare, and all the harps of angels fall short of its worthy honour. Yet I do believe, and my heart prompts me to say so, that the highest praise of every ransomed soul and of the entire Christian church should be offered to the blessed *person* of Jesus Christ, our adorable Lord. The love of his heart is excelled by the heart which gave forth that love, and the wonders of his hand are outdone by the hand itself, which wrought those godlike miracles of grace. We ought to bless him for what he has done for us as Mediator in the place of humble service under the law, and for what he suffered for us as Substitute on the altar of sacrifice from before the foundation of the world; and for what he is doing for us as Advocate in the place of highest honour at the right hand of the Majesty on high: but still the best thing about Christ is Christ himself. We prize *his*, but we worship *him*. His gifts are valued, but he himself is adored. While we contemplate, with mingled feelings of awe, admiration, and thankfulness, his atonement, his resurrection, his glory in heaven, and his second coming, still it is Christ himself, stupendous in his dignity as the Son of God, and superbly beautiful as the Son of man, who sheds an incomparable charm on all those wonderful achievements, wherein his might and his merit, his goodness and his grace appear so conspicuous. For *him* let our choicest spices be reserved, and to him let our sweetest anthems be raised. Our choicest ointment must be poured upon his head, and for his own self alone our most costly alabaster boxes must be broken.

“*He* is altogether lovely.” Not only is his teaching attractive, his doctrine persuasive, his life irreproachable, his character enchanting, and his work a self-denying labour for the common good of all his people, but he himself is altogether lovely. I suppose at first we shall always begin to love him because he first loved us, and even to the

last his love to us will always be the strongest motive of our affection towards him ; still there ought to be added to this another reason less connected with ourselves, and more entirely arising out of his own superlative excellence ; we ought to love him because he is lovely and deserves to be loved. The time should come, and with some of us it has come, when we can heartily say “ we love him because we cannot help it, for his all-conquering loveliness has quite ravished our hearts.” Surely it is but an unripe fruit to love him merely for the benefits which we have received at his hand. It is a fruit of grace, but it is not of the ripest flavour ; at least, there are other fruits, both new and old, which we have laid up for thee, O our beloved, and some of them have a daintier taste. There is a sweet and mellow fruit which can only be brought forth by the summer sun of fellowship—love because of the Redeemer’s intrinsic goodness and personal sweetness. Oh that we might love our Lord for his own sake, love him because he is so supremely beautiful that a glimpse of him has won our hearts, and made him dearer to our eyes than light. Oh that all true and faithful disciples of our beloved Lord would press forward towards that state of affection, and never rest till they reach it ! If any of you have not reached it, you need not therefore doubt your own safety, for whatever the reason why you love Jesus, if you love him at all, it is a sure pledge and token that he loves you, and that you are saved in him with an everlasting salvation. Still covet earnestly the best gifts, and rise to the highest degree of devotion. Love as the purest of the saints have loved ; love as John the apostle loved, for still your Lord exceeds all the loving homage you can pay to him. Love his person, love himself ; for he is better than all that he has done or given ; and as from himself all blessings flow, so back to himself should all love return.

Our text tells us that Christ is altogether lovely. What a wealth of thought and feeling is contained in that exclamation ! I am embarrassed to know how to preach on such a subject, and half inclined to wish it had not been laid so much upon my heart. What, I pray you, what is loveliness ? To discern it is one thing, but it is quite another thing to describe it. There is not one amongst us but knows how to appreciate beauty, and to be enamoured of its attractions, but how many here could tell us what it is ? Stand up, my brother, and define it. Perhaps while you were sitting down you thought you could easily tell the tale, but now you are on your feet you find that it is not quite so easy to clothe in words the thoughts which floated through your brain. What is beauty ? Cold-blooded word-mongers answer, *fitness*. And certainly there is fitness in all loveliness. But do not tell me that beauty is mere fitness, for I have seen a world of fitness in this world which, nevertheless, seemed to me to be inexpressibly ugly and unloveable. A wise man tells me that beauty is *proportion* ; but neither is this a full description by many a league. No doubt it is desirable that the features should be well balanced ; the eyes should be fitly set, no one feature should be exaggerated, and none should be dwarfed.

“ In nature what affects our hearts,
Is not th’ exactness of peculiar parts :
’Tis not a lip or eye we beauty call,
But the joint force and full result of all.”

Harmony is beauty. Yet I have seen the chiselled marble, fashioned with skilful art into a well-nigh perfect form, which did not, could not, impress me with a sense of loveliness. There stands in one of the halls of the Vatican a statue of Antinous. Every feature in that statue is perfect in itself, and in complete harmony with all the rest. You could not find the slightest fault with eye or nose or mouth. It is indeed as much the ideal of male beauty as the Venus is of female charms, yet no one could ever have been enchanted with the statue, or have felt affection to the form which it represents. There is no expression whatever in the features. Everything is so adjusted and proportioned that you want a divergence to relieve you. The materialism is so carefully measured out that there needs a stir, a break in the harmony to give at least some semblance of a soul. Beauty, then, consists not in mere harmony, nor in balancing the features.

Loveliness surely is *attractiveness*. Yes, but that is another way of saying you do not know what it is. It is a something that attracts you, and constrains you to exclaim, "Nought under heaven so strongly doth allure." We feel its power, we become its slaves; but we cannot write with pen of cold steel, nor could we write even with a pen of lightning, a description of what it is. How, then, can I—enamoured, entranced, enraptured as I am with him whom my soul loveth—how can I speak of him? He is altogether lovely? Where shall I find words, terms, expressions that shall fitly set him forth? Unless the Eternal Spirit shall upraise me out of myself I must for ever be incapable of setting forth the Well-beloved.

Besides, were I baffled by nothing else, there is this, that the beauty of Christ is mysterious. It surpasses all the comeliness of human form. He may have had great beauty according to the flesh. That I cannot tell, but I should imagine that such a perfect soul as his must have inhabited a perfectly moulded body. Never yet did you or I gaze with satisfaction upon the work of any painter who has tried to picture our Lord Jesus Christ. We have not blamed the great masters, but we have felt that the effort surpassed their powers. How could they photograph the sun? The loftiest conceptions of great artists in this case fall far short of the mark. When the brightness of the Father's glory is the subject the canvas glows in vain. Art sits at her easel and produces diligently many a draught of the sacred features; but they are all failures, and they must be. Who shall ever depict Immanuel, God-with-us? I suppose that, by-and-by, when our Lord had entered upon his active life, and encountered its struggles, his youthful beauty was marred with lines of sadness and sorrow. Still his courage so overshadowed his cares, the mercy he showed so surpassed the misery he shared, and the grace he dispensed so exceeded the griefs that he carried, that a halo of real glory must ever have shone around his brow. His countenance must still have been lovely even when surrounded with the clouds of care and grief. How can we describe even the marred visage? It is a great mystery, but a sure fact, that in our Lord's marred countenance his beauty is best seen. Anguish gave him a loveliness which else he had not reached. His passion put the finishing touch upon his unrivalled loveliness.

But, brethren, I am not about to speak of Christ's loveliness after

the flesh, for now after the flesh know we him no more. It is his moral and spiritual beauty, of which the spouse in the song most sweetly says, "Yea, he is altogether lovely." The loveliness which the eye dotes on is mere varnish when compared with that which dwells in virtue and holiness; the worm will devour the loveliness of skin and flesh, but a lovely character will endure for ever.

I. **THIS IS RARE PRAISE.** Let that be our first head. This is rare praise. What if I say it is unique? For of no other being could it be said, "Yea, he is altogether lovely."

It means, first, that *all that is in him is lovely, perfectly lovely.* There is no point in our Lord Jesus that you could improve. To paint the rose were to spoil its ruddy hue. To tint the lily, for he is lily as well as rose, were to mar its whiteness. Each virtue in our Lord is there in a state of absolute perfection: it could not be more fully developed. If you were able to conceive of each virtue at its ripest stage it would be found in him. In the matter of transparent ingenuousness and sterling honesty, did ever man speak or act so truthfully as he? Ask, on the other hand, for sympathizing tenderness and love, was ever any so gentle as Jesus? Do you want reverence to God? how he bows before the Father. Do you want boldness before men? how he beards the Pharisees. You could not better anything which you find in Jesus. Wherever you shall cast your eye it may rest with satisfaction, for the best of the best of the best is to be seen in him. He is altogether lovely at every separate point, so that the spouse, when she began with his head, descended to his feet, and then lifting her eyes upward again upon a return voyage of delight, she looked into his countenance and summed up all that she had seen in this one sentence, "He is altogether lovely." This is rare praise.

And he is all that is lovely. In each one of his people you will find something that is lovely,—in one there is faith, in another abounding love; in one tenderness, in another courage, but you do not find all good things in any one saint—at least not all of them in full perfection; but you find all virtues in Jesus, and each one of them at its best. If you would take the best quality of one saint, and the best quality of another—yea, the best out of each and all the myriads of his people, you would find no grace or goodness among them all which Jesus does not possess in the fullest degree and in the highest perfection. He combines all the virtues, and gives them all a sweetness over and beyond themselves. In flowers you have a separate beauty belonging to each; no one flower is just like another, but each one blushes with its own loveliness: but in our Lord these separate and distinct beauties are found united in one. Christ is the posy in which all the beauties of the garden of perfection are bound up. Each gem has its own radiance: the diamond is not like the ruby, nor the ruby like the emerald; but Christ is that ring in which you have sapphire, ruby, diamond, emerald, set in choice order, so that each one heightens the other's brilliance. Look not for anything lovely out of Jesus, for he has all the loveliness. All perfections are in him making up one consummate perfection; and all the loveliness which is to be seen elsewhere is but a reflection of his own unrivalled charms.

In Jesus Christ—this, moreover, is rare praise again—*there is nothing*

that is unlovely. You have a friend whom you greatly admire and fondly esteem, of whom, nevertheless, I doubt not you have often said to yourself in an undertone, "I wish I could take away a little of the rough edge of his manners here and there." You never thought that of Christ. You have observed of one man that he is so bold as to be sometimes rude; and of another that he is so bland and amiable that he is apt to be effeminate. You have said, "That sweetness of his is exceedingly good, but I wish that it were qualified with sterner virtues." But there is nothing to tone down or alter in our divine Lord. He is altogether lovely. Have you not sometimes in describing a friend been obliged to forget, or omit, some rather prominent characteristic when you wished to make a favourable impression? You have had to paint him as the artist once painted Oliver Cromwell; the great wart over the eyebrow was purposely left out of the portrait. Cromwell, you know, said, "Paint me as I am, or not at all." We have, however, often felt that it was kind to leave out the warts when we were talking of those we esteemed, and to whom we would pay a graceful tribute. But there is nothing to leave out in Christ, nothing to hold back, or to guard, or to extenuate. In him is nothing redundant, nothing overgrown. He is altogether lovely. You never need put the finger over the scar in his case, as Apelles did when he painted his hero. No; tell it all out: reveal the details of his private life and secret thoughts, they need no concealment. Lay bare the very heart of Christ, for that is the essence of love and loveliness. Speak of his death-wounds, for in his scars there is more beauty than in the uninjured comeliness of another: and even when he lies dead in the tomb he is more comely than the immortal angels of God at their best estate. Nothing about our Lord needs to be concealed; even his cross, at which his enemies stumble, is to be daily proclaimed, and it will be seen to be one of his choicest beauties.

Frequently, too, in commending a friend whom you highly appreciated, you have been prone to ask for consideration of his position, and to make excuse for blemishes which you would fain persuade us are less actual than apparent. You have remarked how admirably he acts considering his surroundings. Conscious that someone would hint at an imperfection, you have anticipated the current of conversation by alluding to the circumstances which rendered it so hard for your friend to act commendably. You have felt the need of showing that others influenced him, or that infirmity restrained him. Did you ever feel inclined to apologize for Christ? Did he not always stand unbending beneath life's pressure, upright and unmoved amidst the storms and tempests of an evil world? The vilest calumnies have been uttered against him, in the age just past which produced creatures similar to Thomas Paine, but they never required an answer; and as for the more refined attacks of our modern scepticism, they are for the most part unworthy even of contempt. They fall beneath the glance of truth, withered by the glance of the eye of honesty. We never feel concerned to vindicate the character of Jesus; we know it to be safe against all comers. No man has been able to conjure up an accusation against Jesus. They seek false witnesses, but their testimony agrees not together. The sharp arrows of slander fall blunted from the shield of his perfectness. Oh, no; he is altogether lovely in

this sense—that there is nothing whatever in him that is not lovely. You may look, and look, and look again, but there is nothing in him that will not bear scrutiny world without end. Taking the Lord Jesus Christ as a whole—this is what our text intends to tell us—he is inexpressibly lovely—*altogether* lovely. The words are packed as tightly as they can be, but the meaning is greater than the words. Some translate the passage “He is all desires,” and it is a good translation too, and contains a grand truth. Christ is so lovely that all you can desire of loveliness is in him; and even if you were to sit down and task your imagination and burden your understanding, to contrive, to invent, to fashion the ideal of something that should be inimitable—ay (to utter a paradox) if you could labour to conceive something which should be inconceivably lovely, yet still you would not reach to the perfection of Christ Jesus. He is above, not only all we think, but all we dream of.

Do you all believe this? Dear hearers, do you think of Jesus in this fashion? We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen. But no man among you will receive our witness until he can say, “I also have seen him, and having seen him, I set to my seal that he is altogether lovely.”

II. And now, secondly, as this is rare praise, so likewise IT IS PERPETUAL PRAISE. You may say of Christ whenever you look at him, “Yea, he is altogether lovely.” He always was so. As God over all, he is blessed for ever, Amen. When in addition to his godhead, he assumed our mortal clay, was he not inimitably lovely then? The babe in Bethlehem was the most beautiful sight that ever the world beheld. No fairer flower ever bloomed in the garden of creation than the mind of that youth of Nazareth gradually unfolding, as he “grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.” All the while he lived on earth, what moral perfections, what noble qualities, what spiritual charms were about his sacred person! His life among men is a succession of charming pictures. And he was lovely in his bitter passion, when as the thick darkness overshadowed his soul he prayed, in an agony of desire, “Not my will, but thine, be done.” The bloody sweat did not disfigure, but adorn him. And oh, was he not lovely when he died? Without resentment he interceded for his murderers. His patience, his self-possession, his piety, as “the faithful martyr,” have fixed as the meridian of time the hour when he said, “It is finished,” and “bowed his head,” and “cried with a loud voice, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” He is lovely in his resurrection from the dead; beyond description lovely. Not a word of accusation did he utter against his cruel persecutors, though he had risen clothed with all power in heaven and in earth. With such tender sympathy did he make himself known to his sorrowing disciples, that despite the waywardness of their unbelief their hearts’ instinct told them it was “*the same Jesus.*” *He is altogether lovely.*

He will be lovely when he comes with solemn pomp, and sound of trumpet, and escort of mighty angels, and brings all his saints who have departed with him, and calls up those that are alive and remain on the earth till his advent, to meet him in the air. Oh, how lovely he will appear to the two throngs who will presently join in one company! How admirable will his appearance be! How eyes, ears, hearts

and voices will greet him! With what unanimity the host redeemed by blood will account their highest acclamations as a trivial tribute to his honour and glory! "He is altogether lovely." Yea, and he shall be lovely for ever and ever when your eyes and mine shall eternally find their heaven in beholding him. "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever," is always worthy of this word of praise—"altogether lovely."

Let us retrace our steps for a minute. The more we study the four gospels, the more charmed we are with *the gospel*; for as a modern author has well said, "The gospels, like the gospel, are most divine because they are most human." As followers of Jesus, rank yourselves with those men who companied with him all the time that he went in and out among them; and you shall find him *lovely in all conditions*. Lovely when he talks to a leper, and touches and heals him; lovely by the bedside when he takes the fever-stricken patient by the hand and heals her; lovely by the wayside, when he greets the blind beggar, puts his finger on his eyes and bids him see; lovely when he stands on the sinking vessel and rebukes the waves; lovely when he meets the bier and re-kindles the life that had expired; lovely when he visits the mourners, goes with the sisters of Bethany to the new-made grave, and weeps, and groans, and—majestically lovely—bids the dead come forth. Lovely is he when he rides through the streets of Jerusalem upon a colt, the foal of an ass. Oh, had we been there, we would have plucked the palm branches, and we would have taken off our garments to strew the way. Hosannah, lovely Prince of Peace! But he was just as lovely when he came from the garden with his face all besmeared with bloody sweat; just as lovely when they said, "Crucify him, crucify him"; just as lovely, and if possible more so, when down those sacred cheeks there dripped the cursed spittle from the rough soldiers' mouths; ay, and loveliest, to my eyes loveliest of all, when mangled, wounded, fainting, bruised, dying, he said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" uttering a plaintive cry of utmost grief from the felon's gibbet whereon he died. Yea, view him where you will, in any place soever, is he not—I speak to you who know him, and not to those who never saw him with the eye of faith—is he not, in the night and in the day, on the sea and on the land, on earth and in heaven, altogether lovely?

He is lovely in all his offices. What an entrancing sight to see the king in his beauty, with his diadem upon his head, as he now sits in yonder world of brightness! How charming to view him as a priest, with the Urim and Thummim, wearing the names of his people jewelled on his breastplate! And what a vision of simple beauty, to see him as a prophet teaching his people in touching parables of homely interest, of whom they said, "Never man spake like this man"! The very tones of his voice, and the glance of his eyes, made his eloquence so supreme that it enthralled men's hearts. Yes, he is lovely, altogether lovely in any and every character. We know not which best befits him, the highest or the lowliest positions. Let him be what he may—Lamb or Shepherd, Brother or King, Saviour or Master, Foot-washer or Lord—in every relation he is altogether lovely.

Get a view of him, my brethren, from any point and see whether he is not lovely. Do you recollect the first sight you ever had of him?

It was on a day when your eyes were red with weeping over sin, and you expected to see the Lord dressed in anger coming forth to destroy you. Oh, it was the happiest sight I ever saw when I beheld my sins rolling into his sepulchre and when looking up I beheld him my substitute bleeding on the tree. Altogether lovely was he that day. Since then providence has given us a varied experience and taken us to different points of view that we might look at Christ, and see him under many aspects. We look at statues from several standpoints if we would criticise them. A great many in London are hideous from all points of view—others are very well if you look at them this way, but if you go over yonder and look from another point the artist appears to have utterly failed. Now, beloved, look at Jesus from any point you like, and he is at his best from each and every corner. You have been in prosperity: God multiplied your children and blessed your basket and your store,—was Jesus lovely then? Assuredly he was the light of your delights. Nothing he had given you vied with himself. He rose in your hearts superior to his own best gifts. But you tell me that you have been very sick, and you have lost one after another of your dear ones; your means have been reduced; you have come down in the world: say, then, is Jesus lovely now? I know that you will reply “Yes, more than ever is Christ delightful in mine eyes.” Well, you have had very happy times, and you have been on the mount of hallowed friendship. The other Sunday morning many of us were up there, and thought like Peter that we should like to stay there for ever; and is not Jesus lovely when he is transfigured and we are with him? Yes, but at another time you are down in the depths with Jonah, at the bottom of the sea. Is not Christ lovely then? Yes, even there he hears our prayer out of his holy temple, and brings us again from the deep abyss. We shall soon lie dying. Oh, my brethren, what brave talk God’s people have often given us about their Lord when they have been on the edge of the grave! That seems to be a time when the Well-beloved takes the veil off his face altogether and sits by the bedside, and lets his children look into his face, and see him as he is. I warrant you the saints forget the ghastliness of death when their hearts are ravished with the loveliness of Christ.

Yes, hitherto, up to this point Jesus has been lovely; and now let us add that he will always be so. You know there are persons whom you account beautiful when you are young, but when you grow older in years, riper in judgment, and more refined in taste, you meet with others who look far more beautiful. Now, what think you of your Lord? Have you met with anyone in fact or in fable more beautiful than he? You thought him charming when you were but a babe in grace. What think you of him now? Taste, you know, grows, and develops with education: an article of vertu which fascinated you years ago has no longer any charms for you because your taste is raised. Has your spiritual taste outgrown your Lord’s beauties? Come, brothers, does Christ go down as you learn truth more exactly and acquaint yourself more fully with him? Oh no. You prize him a thousand times more to-day than you did when the first impression of his goodness was formed in your mind. Some things which look very lovely at a distance lose their loveliness when you get near to them: but

is it not true (I am sure it is) that the nearer you get to Christ the lovelier he is? Some things are only beautiful in your eyes for their novelty: you admire them when you have seen them once; if you were to see them a dozen times you would not care much about them. What say you about my Master? Is it not true that the oftener you see him, the more you know him, and the more familiar your intercourse with him, the more he rises in your esteem? I know it is so; and well, therefore, did the spouse say, "He is altogether lovely."

Christ is altogether lovely in this respect—that, when men reproach him and rail at him, he is often all the lovelier in his people's eyes. I warrant you Christ has been better known by the burn-side in Scotland by his covenanting people than ever he has been seen under the fretted roof of cathedral architecture. Away there in lonely glens, amid the mosses and the hills, where Covenanters met for fear of Claverhouse and his dragoons, the Lord Jesus has shone forth like the sun in his strength. We have nowadays to be satisfied with his moonlight face, but in persecuting days his children have seen his sun face, and oh! how glad they have been. Hear how the saints sing in prison! Listen to their charming notes, even on the rack, when the glory of his presence fills their souls with heaven on earth, and makes them defy the torments of the flesh. The Lord Jesus is more lovely to the soul that can bear reproach for him than he is to any other. Put the cross on his back if you will, but we love him all the better for that. Nail up his hands, but we love him all the better for that. Now fasten his feet; ay, but our soul melteth with love to him, and she feels new reasons for loving him when she beholds the nails. Now stand ye around the cross, ye worldlings, and mock him if ye will. Taunt and jest, and jeer and jibe—these do but make us love the better the great and glorious one, who "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Beloved, you shall keep on looking at Christ from all these points of view till you get to heaven, and each time you shall be more enamoured of him. When you reach the celestial city and see him face to face, then shall you say, "The half has not been told us," but even here below Christ is altogether lovely to his people.

III. I leave that head just to notice, in the third place, that though this praise is rare praise and perpetual praise, yet also IT IS TOTALLY INSUFFICIENT PRAISE.

Say ye that he is altogether lovely? It is not enough. It is not a thousandth part enough. No tongue of man, no tongue of angel, can ever set forth his unutterable beauties. "Oh," say you, "but it is a great word, though short; very full of meaning though soon spoken—*altogether lovely*." I tell you it is a poor word. It is a word of despair. It is a word which the spouse uttered, because she had been trying to describe her Lord and she could not do it, and so she put this down in very desperation: as much as to say, "There, the task is too great for me. I will end it. This is all I can say. 'Yea, he is altogether lovely.' " I am sure John Berridge was right when he said—

"Living tongues are dumb at best,
We must die to speak of Christ."

Brethren, the praise of the text is insufficient praise, I know, because it is praise given by one who had never seen him in his glory. It is Old Testament praise this, that he is altogether lovely: praise uttered upon report rather than upon actual view of him. Truly I know not how to bring better, but *I shall know* one day. Till then I will speak his praise as best I can, though it fall far short of his infinite excellence. Our text is cloth of gold, but it is not fit for our Beloved to put the sole of his foot upon. He deserves better than this, for this is only the praise of a church that had not seen him die, and had not seen him rise, and had not seen him in the splendour at the divine right hand. "Well," say you, "try if you can do better." No, I will not, because if I did praise him better, the style would not last long, for he is coming quickly, and the best thing the best speaker could ever say of him will be put out of date by the majesty of his appearing. His chariot is waiting at his door now, and he may soon come forth from his secret chambers and be among us, and oh! the glory—oh! the glory! Paul, you know, stole a glance through the lattices one day when he was caught up into the third heaven. Somebody said to me, "I wonder Paul did not tell us what he saw." Ay, but what he saw he might not tell, and the words he heard were words which it were not lawful for a man to utter, and yet to live among this evil generation. We shall hear those words ourselves soon, and see those sights not many days hence, so let it stand as it does, "He is altogether lovely." But when you have thus summed up all that our poor tongues can express, you must not say, "Now we have described him." Oh no, sirs, ye have but held a candle to this glorious sun, for he is such an one as thoughts cannot compass, much less language describe.

I leave this point with the reflection, that God intends to describe him and set him forth one day. He is waiting patiently, for longsuffering is part of Christ's character; and God is setting forth the longsuffering of Christ in the patient waiting of these eighteen hundred years. But the day shall presently dawn and usher in the everlasting age when Christ shall be better seen, for every eye shall see him, and every tongue confess that he is Lord. The whole earth will one day be sweet with the praise of Jesus. Earth, did I say? This alabaster box of Christ's sweetness has too much fragrance in it for the world to keep it all to itself; the sweetness of our Lord's person will rise above the stars, and perfume worlds unknown. It will fill heaven itself. Eternity shall be occupied with declaring the praises of Jesus. Seraphs shall sing of it; angels shall harp it; the redeemed shall declare it. He is altogether lovely. The cycles of eternity as they revolve shall only confirm the statement of the blood-redeemed that he is altogether lovely. O that the day were come when we shall bow with them and sing with them! Wait a little while and be not weary, and you shall be at home, and then you shall know that I spoke the truth when I said that this was insufficient praise. Earth is too narrow to contain him, heaven is too little to hold him, eternity itself too short for the utterance of all his praises.

IV. So I close with this last thought, which may God bless, for practical uses. This praise is **VERY SUGGESTIVE**.

If Christ be altogether lovely it suggests a question. Suppose I

never saw his loveliness. Suppose that in this house there should be souls that never saw anything in Christ to make them love him. If you were to go to some remote island where beauty consisted in having one eye and a twisted mouth, and a sea-green complexion, you would say, "Those people are strange beings." Such are the people of this world. Spiritual beauty is not appreciated by them. This world appreciates the man who makes money, however reckless he may be of the welfare of others while scheming to heap up riches for himself. As for the man who slays his fellow-creatures by thousands, they mount him on a bronze horse, put him on an arch, or they pile up a column, and set him as near heaven as they can. He slew his thousands: he died blood-red: he was an emperor, a tyrant, a conqueror: the world feels his power and pays its homage. As for this Jesus, he only gave his life for men, he was only pure and perfect, the mirror of disinterested love. The vain world cannot see in him a virtue to admire. It is a blind world, a fool world, a world that lieth in the wicked one. Not to discern the beauties of Jesus is an evidence of terrible depravity. Have you, my dear friend, frankly to confess that you were never enamoured of him who was holy, harmless, and undefiled, and went about doing good? Then let this come home to you—that the question is not as to whether Christ is lovely or not, the mistake is here—that you have not a spiritually enlightened eye, a fine moral perception, nor even a well-regulated conscience, or you would see his loveliness at once. You are dark and blind. God help you to feel this.

Do you not love Christ? Then let me ask you why you do not? There was never a man yet that knew Christ that could give a reason for not loving him, neither is there such a reason to be discovered. He is altogether lovely. In nothing is he unlovable. Oh I wish that the good Spirit of God would whisper in your heart, and incline you to say, "I will see about this Christ. I will read of him. I will look at the four portraits of him painted by the evangelists, and if he be indeed thus lovely, no doubt he will win my heart as he appears to have won the hearts of others." I pray he may. But do not, I pray you, continue to deny Christ your love. It is all you can give him. It is a poor thing, but he values it. He would sooner have your heart than all the gold in Europe. He would sooner have the heart of a poor servant girl or of a poor humble labourer upon the soil than the queen's diadem. He loveth love. Love is his gem—his jewel. He delights to win it, and if he be indeed altogether lovely, let him have it. You have known people, I dare say, whom you could not help loving. They never had to say to you, "Love me," for you were captivated at once by the very sight of them. In like manner many and many have only received one beam of light from the Holy Spirit, and have thereby seen who Jesus was, and they have at once said of him, "Thou hast ravished my heart with one look of thine eyes," and so it has been that all their life long they have loved their Lord.

Now, the praise is suggestive still further. "Is Christ altogether lovely? Then do I love him? As a child of God, do I love him as much as I ought? I do love him. Yes, blessed be his name, I do love him. But what a poor, cold, chill love it is. How few are the sacrifices I make for him. How few are the offerings that I present to him.

How little is the fellowship that I maintain with him." Brother, is there a rival in your heart? Do you allow anyone to come in between you and the "altogether lovely." If so, chase out the intruder. Christ must have all your heart, and let me tell you the more we love him the more bliss we shall have. A soul that is altogether given up to the love of Christ lives above care and sorrow. It has care and sorrow, but the love of Christ kills all the bitterness by its inexpressible sweetness. I cannot tell you how near a man may live to heaven, but I am persuaded that a very large proportion of the bliss of heaven may be enjoyed before we come there. There is one conduit pipe through which heavenly joy will flow, and if you draw from it you may have as much as you will. "Abide in me" says Christ; and if you do abide in his love you shall have his joy fulfilled in yourselves that your joy may be full. You will have more capacious vessels in heaven, but even now the little vessel that you have can be filled up to the brim by knowing the inexpressible loveliness of Jesus and surrendering your hearts to it.

Oh that I could rise to something better than myself. I often feel like a chick in the egg; I am picking my way out, and I cannot get clear of my prison. Fain would I chip the shell, come forth to freedom, develop wings, and soar heavenward, singing on the road. Would God that were our portion. If anything can help us to get out of the shell, and to begin to rise and sing, it must be a full and clear perception that Jesus is altogether lovely. Come, let us be married to him afresh to-night. Come, believing hearts, yield again to his charms; again surrender yourselves to the supremacy of his affection. Let us have the love of our espousals renewed. As you come to his table bethink you of the lips of Christ, of which the spouse had been speaking before she uttered my text,—“His mouth is most sweet.” There are three things about Christ's mouth that are very sweet. The first is his word: you have heard that. The second is his breath. Come, Holy Spirit, make thy people feel that. And the third is his kiss. May every believing soul have that sweet token of his eternal love.

Forgive my ramblings. May God bless to all his people the word that has been spoken. May some that never knew my Master ask to know him to-night. Go home and seek him. Read the word to find him. Cry to him in prayer and he will be found of you. He is so lovely that I should not live without loving him; and I shall deeply regret if any one of you shall spend another four-and-twenty hours without having had a sight of his divine face by faith.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 John iii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—782, 793, 785.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THREE CROSSES.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”—Galatians vi. 14.

WHENEVER we rebuke other people we should be prepared to clear ourselves of their offence. The apostle had been rebuking those who wished to glory in the flesh. In denouncing false teachers and upbraiding their weak-minded followers he used sharp language, while he appealed to plain facts and maintained his ground with strong arguments; and this he did without fear of being met by a flank movement, and being charged with doing the same things himself. Very fitly, therefore, does he contrast his own determined purpose with their plausible falseness. They were for making a fair show in the flesh, but he shrunk not from the deepest shame of the Christian profession; nay, so far from shrinking, he even counted it honour to be scorned for Christ's sake, exclaiming, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The Galatians, and all others to whom his name was familiar, well knew how truly he spoke; for the manner of his life as well as the matter of his teaching had supplied evidence of this assertion, which none of his foemen could gainsay. There had not been in all his ministry any doctrine that he extolled more highly than this of “Christ crucified”; nor any experience that he touched on more tenderly than this “fellowship with Christ in his sufferings”; nor any rule of conduct that he counted more safe than this following in the footsteps of him who “endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” His example accorded with his precept. God grant, of his grace, that there may always be with us the like transparent consistency. Sometimes when we notice an evil, and protest as boldly and conscientiously as we can against it, we feel that our protest is too obscure to have much influence; it will then be our very best resource resolutely to abstain from the evil ourselves, and so, at least in one person, to

overthrow its power. If you cannot convert a man from his error by an argument, you can at least prove the sincerity of your reasoning by your own behaviour; and thus, if no fortress is captured, you will at least "hold the fort," and you may do more: your faithfulness may win more than your zeal. Vow faithfully within your own heart, and say frankly to your neighbour, "You may do what you will; but as for me, God forbid that I should remove the old landmarks, or seek out new paths, however inviting, or turn aside from that which I know to be the good old way." A determined resolution of that sort, fully adhered to, will often carry more weight and exert more influence on the mind of an individual, especially of a waverer, than a host of arguments. Your actions will speak more loudly than your words.

The apostle in the present case warms with emotion at the thought of anybody presuming to set a carnal ordinance in front of the cross, by wishing to glory in circumcision or any other outward institution. The idea of a ceremony claiming to be made more of than faith in Jesus provoked him, till his heart presently grew hot with indignation, and he thundered forth the words, "God forbid!" He never used the sacred name with lightness; but when the fire was hot within him he called God to witness that he did not, and could not, glory in anything but the cross. Indeed, there is to every true-hearted believer something shocking and revolting in the putting of anything before Jesus Christ, be it what it may, whether it be an idol of superstition or a toy of scepticism, whether it be the fruit of tradition or the flower of philosophy. Do you want new Scriptures to supplement the true sayings of God? Do you want a new Saviour who can surpass him whom the Father hath sealed? Do you want a new sacrifice that can save you from sins which his atoning blood could not expiate? Do you want a modern song to supersede the new song of "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain"? "O foolish Galatians!" said Paul. O silly Protestants! I am inclined to say. We might go on in these times to speak warmly to many of the parties around us—the doting Ritualists, the puffed-up Rationalists, and the self-exalting school of modern thought. I marvel not at Paul's warmth. I only wish that some who think so little of doctrinal discrepancies, as they call them, could but sympathise a little with his holy indignation when he saw the first symptoms of departure from godly simplicity and sincerity. Do you not notice that a little dissembling of a dear brother made him withstand him to his face? When a whole company turned the cold shoulder to the cross of Christ it made him burn with indignation. He could not brook it. The cross was the centre of his hopes; around it his affections twined; there he had found peace to his troubled conscience. God forbid that he should allow it to be trampled on. Besides, it was the theme of his ministry. "Christ crucified" had already proved the power of God to salvation to every soul who had believed the life-giving message as he proclaimed it in every city. Would any of you, he asks, cast a slur on the cross—you who have been converted—you before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified among you? How his eyes flash; how his lips quiver; how his heart grows hot within him; with what vehemence he protests: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

He spreads his eagle wing, and rises into eloquence at once, while still his keen eye looks fiercely upon every enemy of the cross whom he leaves far beneath. Oftentimes in his epistles you observe this. He burns, he glows, he mounts, he soars, he is carried clean away as soon as his thoughts are in fellowship with his Lord Jesus, that meek and patient Sufferer, who offered himself a sacrifice for our sins. When his tongue begins to speak of the glorious work which the Christ of God has done for the sons of men it finds a sudden liberty, and he becomes as "a hind let loose; he giveth goodly words." May we have something of that glow within our breasts to-night, and whenever we think of our Lord. God forbid that we should be cold-hearted when we come near to Jesus; God forbid that we should ever view with heartless eye and lethargic soul the sweet wonders of that cross on which our Saviour loved and died.

Let us, then, in that spirit approach our text; and we notice at once three crucifixions. These are the summary of the text. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"; that is, *Christ crucified*. "By whom," or, "by which" (read it whichever way you like), "the world is crucified unto me"; that is, *a crucified world*. "And I unto the world"; that is, *Paul himself, or the believer, crucified with Christ*. I see, again, Calvary before me with its three crosses—Christ in the centre, and on either side of him a crucified person: one who dies to feel the second death, and another who dies to be with him in paradise. At these three crosses let us proceed to look.

I. First, then, the main part of our subject lies in CHRIST CRUCIFIED, in whom Paul gloried. I call your attention to the language; "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross." Some popular authors and public speakers, when they have to state a truth, count it necessary to clothe it in very delicate language. They, perhaps, do not quite intend to conceal its point and edge; but, at any rate, they do not want the projecting angles and bare surfaces of the truth to be too observable, and therefore they cast a cloak around it; they are careful to scabbard the sword of the Spirit. The apostle Paul might have done so here, if he had chosen, but he disdains the artifice. He presents the truth "in the worst possible form," as his opponents say—"in all its naked hideousness," as the Jew would have it; for he does not say, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the *death* of Christ"; but in the *cross*. *You* do not realize, I think—we cannot do so in these days—how the use of that word "cross" would grate on ears refined in Galatia and elsewhere. In those days it meant the felon's tree, the hangman's gibbet; and the apostle, therefore, does not hesitate to put it just so: "Save in that gibbet on which my Master died." We have become so accustomed to associate the name of "the cross" with other sentiments that it does not convey to us that sense of disgrace which it would inflict upon those who heard Paul speak. A family sensitively shrinks if one of its members has been hanged; and much the same would be the natural feeling of one who was told that his leader was crucified. Paul puts it thus baldly, he lets it jar thus harshly, though it may prove to some a stumblingblock, and to others foolishness; but he will not cloak it, he glories in "*the cross!*"

On the other hand, I earnestly entreat you to observe how he seems

to contrast the glory of the person with the shame of the suffering; for it is not simply the death of Christ, nor of Jesus, nor of Jesus Christ, nor of *the* Lord Jesus Christ, but of "*our Lord Jesus Christ*." Every word tends to set forth the excellence of his person, the majesty of his character, and the interest which all the saints have in him. It *was* a cross, but it was the cross of our Lord: let us worship him! It was the cross of our Lord Jesus the Saviour: let us love him! It was the cross of our Jesus Christ the anointed Messiah: let us reverence him! Let us sit at his feet and learn of him! Each one may say, "It was the cross of *my* Lord Jesus Christ"; but it sweetens the whole matter, and gives a largeness to it when we say, "It was the cross of *our* Lord Jesus Christ." Oh yes, we delight to think of the contrast between the precious Christ and the painful cross, the Son of God and the shameful gibbet. He was Immanuel, God with us; yet did he die the felon's death upon the accursed tree. Paul brings out the shame with great sharpness, and the glory with great plainness. He does not hesitate in either case, whether he would declare the sufferings of Christ or the glory which should follow.

What did he mean, however, by the cross? Of course he cared nothing for the particular piece of wood to which those blessed hands and feet were nailed, for that was mere materialism, and has perished out of mind. He means the glorious doctrine of justification—free justification—through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This is what he means by the cross—the expiation for sin which our Lord Jesus Christ made by his death, and the gift of eternal life freely bestowed on all those who by grace are led to trust in him. To Paul the cross meant just what the brazen serpent meant to Moses. As the brazen serpent in the wilderness was the hope of the sin-bitten, and all that Moses had to do was to bid them look and live, so to-day the cross of Christ—the atonement of Jesus Christ—is the hope of mankind, and our mission is continually to cry, "Look and live! Look and live!" It is this doctrine, this gospel of Christ crucified, at which the present age, with all its vaunted culture and all its vain philosophies, sneers so broadly, it is this doctrine wherein we glory. We are not ashamed to put it very definitely: we glory in substitution, in the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus in our stead. He was "made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." We believe in the imputation of sin to the innocent person of our covenant Head and Representative, in the bearing of the penalty by that substituted One, and the clearing by faith of those for whom he bore the punishment of sin.

Now we glory in this. We glory in it, not as men sometimes boast in a creed which they have received by tradition from their forefathers, for we have learned this truth, each one for himself by the inward teaching of the Holy Ghost, and therefore it is very dear to us. We glory in it with no empty boast, but to the inward satisfaction of our own hearts; we prove that satisfaction by the devout consecration of our

lives to make it known. We have trusted our souls to its truth. If it be a fable our hopes are for ever shipwrecked, our all is embarked in that venture. We are quite prepared to run that risk, content to perish if this salvation should fail us. We live upon this faith. It is our meat and our drink. Take this away there is nothing left us in the Bible worth the having. It has become to us the head and front of our confidence, our hope, our rest, our joy. Instead of being ashamed to preach it, we wish that we could stand somewhere where all the inhabitants of the earth should hear us, and we would thunder it out day and night. So far from being ashamed of acknowledging it, we count it to be our highest honour and our greatest delight to tell it abroad, as we have opportunity, among the sons of men.

But why do we rejoice in it? Why do we glory in it? The answer is so large that I cannot do more than glance at its manifold claims on our gratitude. We glory in it for a thousand reasons. We fail to see anything in the doctrine of atonement that we should not glory in. We have heard a great many dogs bark against it, but dogs will bay the moon in her brightness, and therefore we mind not their howlings. Their noise has sometimes disturbed, though never yet has it frightened us. We have not yet heard a cavil against our Lord or an argument against his atoning blood which has affected our faith the turn of a hair. The Scriptures affirm it, the Holy Ghost bears witness to it, and its effect upon our inner life assures us of it. The analogy between Jewish fasts and festivals and our Christian faith endorses it; there is a chasm that no man yet has been able to bridge without it; it lightens our conscience, gladdens our hearts, inspires our devotion, and elevates our aspirations; we are wedded to it, and daily glory in it.

In the cross of Christ we glory, because we regard it as a matchless exhibition of the attributes of God. We see there the love of God desiring a way by which he might save mankind, aided by his wisdom, so that a plan is perfected by which the deed can be done without violation of truth and justice. In the cross we see a strange conjunction of what once appeared to be two opposite qualities—justice and mercy. We see how God is supremely just; as just as if he had no mercy, and yet infinitely merciful in the gift of his Son. Mercy and justice in fact become counsel upon the same side, and irresistibly plead for the acquittal of the believing sinner. We can never tell which of the attributes of God shines most glorious in the sacrifice of Christ; they each one find a glorious high throne in the person and work of the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Since it has become, as it were, the disk which reflects the character and perfections of God it is meet that we should glory in the cross of Christ; and none shall stay us of our boasting.

We glory in it, next, as the manifestation of the love of Jesus. He was loving inasmuch as he came to earth at all; loving in feeding the hungry, in healing the sick, in raising the dead. He was loving in his whole life: he was embodied charity, the Prince of philanthropists, the King of kindly souls. But oh, his death!—his cruel and shameful death—bearing, as we believe he did, the wrath due to sin, subjecting himself to the curse, though in him was no sin—this shows the love of

Christ at its highest altitude, and therefore do we glory in it, and will never be ashamed to do so.

We glory in the cross, moreover, because it is the putting away of sin. There was no other way of making an end of sin, and making reconciliation for iniquity. To forgive the transgressions without exacting the penalty would have been contrary to all the threatenings of God. It would not have appeased the claims of justice, nor satisfied the conscience of the sinner. No peace of mind can be enjoyed without pardon, and conscience declares that no pardon can be obtained without an atonement. We should have distracted ourselves with the fear that it was only a reprieve, and not a remission, even if the most comforting promises had been given unsealed with the atoning blood. The instincts of nature have convinced men of this truth, for all the world over religion has been associated with sacrifice. Almost every kind of worship that has ever sprung up among the sons of men has had sacrifice for its most prominent feature; crime must be avenged, evil and sin cry from the ground, and a victim is sought to avert the vengeance. The heart craves for something that can calm the conscience: that craving is a relic of the ancient truth learned by man in primeval ages. Now, Christ did make his soul an offering for sin, when his own self he bare our sins in his own body on the tree. With his expiring breath he said, "It is finished!" Oh, wondrous grace! Pardon is now freely published among the sons of men, pardon of which we see the justice and validity. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath God removed our transgressions from us by the death of Christ. This and this alone will put away sin, therefore in this cross of Christ we glory; yea, and in it alone will we glory evermore.

It has put away our sins, blessed be God, so that this load and burden no more weigh us down! We do not speak at random now. It has breathed hope and peace and joy into our spirits. I am sure that no one knows how to glory in the cross unless he has had an experimental acquaintance with its peace-breathing power. I speak what I do know, and testify what I have felt. The burden of my sin laid so heavy upon me that I would sooner have died than have lived. Many a day, and many a night, I felt the flames of hell in the anguish of my heart, because I knew my guilt, but saw no way of righteous forgiveness. Yet in a moment the load went from me, and I felt overflowing love to the Saviour. I fell at his feet awe-stricken that ever he should have taken away my sin and made an end of it. That matchless deed of love won my heart to Jesus. He changed my nature and renewed my soul in that same hour. But, oh, the joy I had! Those who have sunk to the very depths of despair, and risen in a moment to the heights of peace and joy unspeakable, can tell you that they must glory in the cross and its power to save. Why, sirs, we must believe according to our own conscience. We cannot belie that inward witness. We only wish that others had been as deeply convinced of sin, and as truly led to the cross to feel their burden roll from off their shoulder as we have been, and then they, too, would glory in the cross of Christ. Since then we have gone with this remedy in our hands to souls that have been near despair, and we have never found the medicine to fail. Many and many a time have I spoken to people so depressed in spirit that they

seemed not far from the madhouse, so heavy was their sense of sin ; yet have I never known the matchless music of Jesus' name, in any case, fail to charm the soul out of its despondency. " They looked unto him, and were lightened : and their faces were not ashamed." Men who, because they thought there was no hope for them, would have desperately continued in sin, have read that word " hope " written in crimson lines upon the Saviour's dying body, and they have sprung up into confidence, have entered into peace, and henceforth have begun to lead a new life. We glory in the cross because of the peace it brings to every troubled conscience which receives it by faith : our own case has proved to our own souls its efficacy, and what we have seen in others has confirmed our confidence.

Yet we should not glory so much in the cross, were we not convinced that it is the greatest moral power in all the world. We glory in the cross because it gets at men's hearts when nothing else can reach them. The story of the dying Saviour's love has often impressed those whom all the moral lectures in the world could never have moved. Judged and condemned by the unanswerable reasonings of their own consciences, they have not had control enough over their passions to shake off the captivity in which they were held by the temptations that assailed them at every turn, till they have drawn near to the cross of Jesus, and from pardon have gathered hope, and from hope have gained strength to master sin. When they have seen their sin laid on Jesus, they have loved him, and hated the sin that made him to suffer so grievously as their substitute. Then the Holy Ghost has come upon them, and they have resolved, with divine strength, to drive out the sin for which the Saviour died ; they have begun a new life, ay, and they have continued in it, sustained by that same sacred power which first constrained them, and now they look forward to be perfected by it through the power of God. Where are the triumphs of infidelity in rescuing men from sin ? Where are the trophies of philosophy in conquering human pride ? Will you bring us harlots that have been made chaste ; thieves that have been reclaimed ; angry men, of bear-like temper, who have become harmless as lambs, through scientific lectures ? Let our amateur philanthropists, who suggest so much and do so little, produce some instances of the moral transformations that have been wrought by their sophistries. Nay ; they curl their lips, and leave the lower orders to the City Missionary and the Bible Woman. It is the cross that humbles the haughty, lifts up the fallen, refines the polluted, and gives a fresh start to those who are forlorn and desperate. Nothing else can do it. The world sinks lower and lower into the bog of its own selfishness and sin. Only this wondrous lever of the atonement, symbolized by the cross of Christ, can lift our abject race to the place of virtue and honour which it ought to occupy.

We glory in the cross for so many reasons that I cannot hope to enumerate them all. While it ennobles our life, it invigorates us with hope in our death. Death is now deprived of its terrors to us, for Christ has died. We, like him, can say, " Father, into thy hands we commend our spirit." His burial has perfumed the grave ; his resurrection has paved the road to immortality. He rose and left a lamp behind which shows an outlet from the gloom of the sepulchre. The

paradise he immediately predicted for himself and for the penitent who hung by his side has shown us how quick the transition is from mortal pains to immortal joys. "Absent from the body, present with the Lord," is the cheering prospect. Glory be to Christ for ever and for ever that we have this doctrine of "Christ crucified" to preach.

II. The second cross exhibits THE WORLD CRUCIFIED. The apostle says that the world was crucified to him. What does he mean by this? He regarded the world as nailed up like a felon, and hanged upon a cross to die. Well, I suppose he means that its character was condemned. He looked out upon the world which thought so much of itself, and said, "I do not think much of thee, poor world! Thou art like a doomed malefactor." He knew that the world had crucified its Saviour—crucified its God. It had gone to such a length of sin that it had hounded perfect innocence through the streets. Infinite benevolence it had scoffed at and maligned. Eternal truth it had rejected, and preferred a lie; and the Son of God, who was love incarnate, it had put to the death of the cross. "Now," says Paul, "I know thy character, O world! I know thee! and I hold thee in no more esteem than the wretch abhorred for his crimes, who is condemned to hang upon the gibbet and so end his detested life." This led Paul, since he condemned its character, utterly to despise its judgment. The world said, "This Paul is a fool. His gospel is foolishness and he himself is a mere babbler." "Yes," thought Paul, "a deal you know of it!" In this we unite with him. What is your judgment worth? You did not know the Son of God, poor blind world! We are sure that he was perfect, and yet you hunted him to death. Your judgment is a poor thing, O world! You are crucified to us. Now, there are a great many people who could hardly endure to live if they should happen to be misjudged by the world or what is called "society." Oh yes, we must be respectable. We must have every man's good word, or we are ready to faint. Paul was of another mind. What cared he for aught the world might say? How could he wish to please a world so abominable that it had put his Lord to death. He would sooner have its bad opinion than its good. It were better to be frowned at than to be smiled upon by a world that crucified Christ. Certainly, its condemnation is more worth having than its approbation if it can put Christ to death: so Paul utterly despised its judgment, and it was crucified to him. Now, we are told to think a great deal about "public opinion," "popular belief," "the growing feeling of the age," "the sentiment of the period," and "the spirit of the age." I should like Paul to read some of our religious newspapers; and yet I could not wish the good man so distasteful a task, for I dare say he would sooner pine in the Mamertine prison than do so; but, still, I should like to see how he would look after he had read some of those expressions about the necessity of keeping ourselves abreast with the sentiment of the period. "What," he would say, "the sentiment of the world! It is crucified to me! What can it matter what its opinion is? We are of God, little children, and the whole world lieth in the wicked one; would ye heed what the world, that is lying in the wicked one, thinks of you or of the truth of your Lord? Are you going to smooth your tongue, and soften

your speech, to please the world that lieth in the wicked one!" Paul would be indignant with such a proposition. He said, "the world is crucified to me." Hence he looked upon all the world's pleasures as so much rottenness, a carcase nailed to a cross. Can you fancy Paul being taken to the Colosseum at Rome? I try to imagine him made to sit on one of those benches to watch a combat of gladiators. There is the emperor: there are all the great peers of Rome and the senators; and there are those cruel eyes all gazing down upon men who shed each others' blood. Can you picture how Paul would have felt if he had been forced to occupy a seat at that spectacle? It would have been martyrdom to him. He would have closed his eyes and ears against the sight of what Rome thought to be the choicest pleasure of the day. They thronged the imperial city; they poured in mighty streams into the theatre each day to see poor beasts tortured, or men murdering one another: that was the world of Paul's day; and he rightly judged it to be a crucified felon. If he was compelled to see the popular pleasures of to-day, upon which I will say but little, would he not be well-nigh as sick of them as he would have been of the amusements of the amphitheatre at Rome?

To Paul, too, all the honours of the age must have been crucified in like manner. Suppose that Paul settled his mind to think of the wretches who were reigning as emperors in his day! I use the word advisedly, for I would not speak evil of dignities; but really I speak too well of them when I call them wretches. They seem to have been inhuman monsters—"tyrants whose capricious folly violated every law of nature and decency," to whom every kind of lust was a daily habit, and who even sought out new inventions of sensuality, calling them new pleasures. As Paul thought of the iniquities of Napoli, and all the great towns to which the Romans went in their holidays—Pompeii and the like—oh, how he loathed them! And I doubt not that if the apostle were to come here now, if he knew how often rank and title are wont to sink all true dignity in shameful dissipation, and what flagrant profligacy is to be found in high quarters, he might as justly consider all the pomps and dignities and honours of the world that now is to be as little worth as a putrid carcase hanging on a tree and rotting in the sun. He says, "The world is crucified to me: it is hanging on the gallows to me, I think so little of its pleasures and of its pomps."

Alike contemptuously did Paul judge of all the treasures of the world. Paul never spent as much time as it would take to wink his eye in thinking of how much money he was worth. Having food and raiment he was therewith content. Sometimes he had scarcely that. He casually thanks the Philippians for ministering to his necessities, but he never sought to store anything, nor did he live with even half a thought of aggrandizing himself with gold and silver. "No," he said, "this will all perish with the using," and so he treated the world as a thing crucified to him. Now, Christian man, can you say as much as this—that the world, in its mercantile aspect, as well as in its motley vices and its manifold frivolities, is a crucified thing to you? Now, look what the world says. "Make money, young man, make money! Honestly if you can, but by all means make money. Look about you, for if you are not sharp you will not succeed. Keep your

own counsel, and rather play the double than be the dupe. Your character will rise with the credit you get on 'Change." Now, suppose that you get the money, what is the result? The net result, as I often find it, is a paragraph in one of the newspapers to say that So-and-so Esquire's will was proved in the Probate Court under so many thousands. Then follows a grand squabble among all his relatives which shall eat him up. That is the consummation of a life of toil and care and scheming. He has lived for lucre, and he has to leave it behind. There is the end of that folly. I have sometimes thought of the contrast between the poor man's funeral and the rich man's funeral. When the poor man dies there are his sons and daughters weeping with real distress, for the death of the father brings sadness and sympathy into that house. The poor man is to be buried, but it can only be managed by the united self-denials of all his sons and daughters. There is Mary out at service; she, perhaps, contributes more than the others towards the funeral, for she has no family of her own. The elder son and the younger brothers all pinch themselves to pay a little; and the tears that are shed that evening when they come home from the grave are very genuine: they *do* suffer, and they prove their sorrow by rivalling one another in the respect they pay to their parent. Now you shall see the rich man die. Of course everybody laments the sad loss: it is the proper thing. Empty carriages swell the procession to the grave by way of empty compliment. The mourners return, and there is the reading of that blessed document the will; when that is read the time for tears is over in almost every case. Few are pleased; the one whom fortune favours is the envy of all the rest. Sad thoughts and sullen looks float on the surface, not in respect to the man's departure, but concerning the *means* he has left and the mode in which he has disposed of them. Oh, it is a poor thing to live for, the making of money and the hoarding of it. But still the genius of rightly getting money can be consecrated to the glory of God. You can use the wealth of this world in the service of the Master. To gain is not wrong. It is only wrong when grasping becomes the main object of life, and grudging grows into covetousness which is idolatry. To every Christian that and every other form of worldliness ought to be crucified, so that we can say, "For me to live is not myself, but it is Christ; I live that I may honour and glorify him."

When the apostle said that the world was crucified to him, he meant just this. "I am not enslaved by any of its pursuits. I care nothing for its maxims. I am not governed by its spirit. I do not court its smiles. I do not fear its threatenings. It is not my master, nor am I its slave. The whole world cannot force Paul to lie, or to sin, but Paul will tell the world the truth, come what may." You recollect the words of Palissy, the potter, when the king of France said to him that if he did not change his religion, and cease to be a Huguenot, he was afraid that he should have to deliver him up to his enemies. "Sire," said the potter, "I am sorry to hear you say, 'I am afraid,' for all the men in the world could not make Palissy talk like that. I am afraid of nobody, and I *must* do nothing but what is right." Oh, yes; the man that fears God and loves the cross has a moral backbone which enables him to stand, and he snaps his fingers at the world. "Dead felon!" says he, "dead felon! Crucifier of Christ! Cosmos thou callest

thyself. By comely names thou wouldst fain be greeted. Paul is nothing in thine esteem ; but Paul is a match for thee, for he thinks as much of thee as thou dost of him, and no more." Hear him as he cries, "The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." To live to serve men is one thing, to live to bless them is another ; and this we will do, God helping us, making sacrifices for their good. But to fear men, to ask their leave to think, to ask their instructions as to what we shall speak, and how we shall say it—that is a baseness we cannot brook. By the grace of God, we have not so degraded ourselves, and never shall. "The world is crucified to me," says the apostle, "by the cross of Christ."

III. Then he finishes up with the third crucifixion, which is, *I AM CRUCIFIED TO THE WORLD*. We shall soon see the evidence of this crucifixion if we notice how they poured contempt upon him. Once Saul was a great rabbi, a man profoundly versed in Hebrew lore, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, and much admired. He was also a classic scholar and a philosophic thinker, a man of great mental powers, and fit to take the lead in learned circles. But when Paul began to preach Christ crucified—"Bah," they said, "he is an utter fool ! Heed him not !" Or else they said, "Down with him ! He is an apostate !" They cursed him. His name brought wrath into the face of all Jews that mentioned it, and all intelligent Greeks likewise. "Paul ? He is nobody !" He was everybody when he thought their way : he is nobody now that he thinks in God's way.

And then they put him to open shame by suspecting all his motives, and by misrepresenting all his actions. It did not matter what Paul did, they were quite certain that he was self-seeking ; that he was endeavouring to make a fine thing of it for himself. When he acted so that they were forced to own that he was right, they put it in such a light that they made it out to be wrong. There were some who denied his apostleship, and said that he was never sent of God ; and others questioned his ability to preach the gospel. So they crucified poor Paul one way and another to the full.

They went further still. They despised, they shunned him. His old friends forsook him. Some got out of the way, others pointed at him the finger of scorn in the streets. His persecutors showed their rancour against him, now stoning him with lynch-law, and anon with a semblance of legality dragging him before the magistrates. Paul was crucified to them. As for his teaching, they decried him as a babbler—a setter-forth of strange gods. I dare say they often sneered at the cross of Christ which he preached as a nine days' wonder, an almost exploded doctrine, and said, "If you do but shut the mouths of such men as Paul, it will soon be forgotten." I have heard them say in modern times to lesser men, "Your old-fashioned Puritanism is nearly dead, ere long it will be utterly extinct !" But we preach Christ crucified ; the same old doctrine as the apostles preached, and for this by the contempt of the worldly wise we are crucified.

Now, dear Christian friends, if you keep to the cross of Christ you must expect to have this for your portion. The world will be crucified to you, and you will be crucified to the world. You will get the cold shoulder. Old friends will become open foes. They will begin to hate

you more than they loved you before. At home your foes will be the men of your own household. You will hardly be able to do anything right. When you joined in their revels you were a fine fellow; when you could drink, and sing a lascivious song, you were a jolly good fellow; but now they rate you as a fool; they scout you as a hypocrite; and slanderously blacken your character. Let their dislike be a badge of your discipleship, and say, "Now also the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world. Whatever the world says against me for Christ's sake is the maundering of a doomed malefactor, and what do I care for that? And, on the other hand, if I be rejected and despised, I am only taking what I always expected—my crucifixion—in my poor, humble way, after the manner of Christ himself, who was despised and rejected of men."

The moral and the lesson of it all is this. Whatever comes of it, still glory in Christ. Go in for this, dear friends, that whether ye be honour or in dishonour, in good report or in evil report, whether God multiply your substance and make you rich, or diminish it and make you poor, you will still glory in the cross of Christ. If you have health and strength and vigour to work for him, or if you have to lie upon a bed of languishing and bear in patience all your heavenly Father's will, resolve that you will still glory in the cross. Let this be the point of your glorying throughout your lives. Go down the steep of Jordan, and go through Jordan itself, still glorying in the cross, for in the heaven of glory you will find that the blood-bought hosts celebrate the cross as the trophy of their redemption.

Are you trusting in the cross? Are you resting in Jesus? If not, may the Lord teach you this blessed privilege. There is no joy like it. There is no strength like it. There is no life like it. There is no peace like it. At the cross we find our heaven. While upon the cross we gaze all heavenly, holy things abound within our hearts. If you have never been there, the Lord lead you there at this very hour; so shall you be pardoned, accepted, and blest for aye. The Lord grant that you all may be partakers of this grace for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Galatians v. 19—26
vi. 1—18.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—289, 282, 805.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

FORGIVENESS MADE EASY.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”—
Ephesians iv. 32.

THE heathen moralists, when they wished to teach virtue, could not point to the example of their gods, for, according to their mythologists, the gods were a compound of every imaginable, and, I had almost said, unimaginable vice. Many of the classic deities surpassed the worst of men in their crimes: they were as much greater in iniquity as they were supposed to be superior in power. It is an ill day for a people when their gods are worse than themselves. The blessed purity of our holy faith is conspicuous, not only in its precepts, but in the character of the God whom it reveals. There is no excellency which we can propose but we can see it brightly shining in the Lord our God: there is no line of conduct in which a believer should excel but we can point to Christ Jesus our Lord and Master as the pattern of it. In the highest places of the Christian faith you have the highest virtue, and unto God our Father and the Lord Jesus be the highest praise. We can urge you to the tenderest spirit of forgiveness by pointing to God who for Christ’s sake has forgiven you. What nobler motive can you require for forgiving one another? With such high examples, brethren, what manner of people ought we to be? We have sometimes heard of men who were better than their religion, but that is quite impossible with us: we can never, in spirit or in act, rise to the sublime elevation of our divine religion. We should constantly be rising above ourselves, and above the most gracious of our fellow Christians, and yet above us we shall still behold our God and Saviour. We may go from strength to strength in thoughts of goodness and duties of piety, but Jesus is higher still, and evermore we must be looking up to him as we climb the sacred hill of grace.

At this time we wish to speak a little concerning the duties of love and forgiveness; and here we note, at once, that the apostle sets before
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us the example of God himself. Upon that bright example we shall spend most of our time, but I hope not quite so much as to forget the practical part, which is so much needed in these days by certain unforgiving spirits who nevertheless assume the Christian name. The theme of God's forgiving love is so fascinating that we may linger awhile, and a long while too, upon that bright example of forgiveness which God has set before us, but from it all I hope we shall be gathering grace by which to forgive others even to seventy times seven.

We shall take the text word by word, and so we shall obtain the clearest divisions.

I. The first word to think about is "FOR CHRIST'S SAKE." We use these words very often; but probably we have never thought of their force, and even at this time we cannot bring forth the whole of their meaning. Let us touch thereon with thoughtfulness, praying the good Spirit to instruct us. "*For Christ's sake;*" all the good things which God has bestowed upon us have come to us "for Christ's sake," but especially the forgiveness of our sins has come "for Christ's sake." This is the plain assertion of the text. What does it mean? It means, surely, first, *for the sake of the great atonement which Christ has offered.* The great God can, as a just Lawgiver and King, readily pass by our offences because of the expiation for sin which Christ has offered. If sin were merely a personal affront toward God, we have abundant evidence that he would be ready enough to pass it by without exacting vengeance; but it is a great deal more than that. Those who view it as a mere personal affront against God are but very shallow thinkers. Sin is an attack upon the moral government of God; it undermines the foundations of society, and were it permitted to have its way it would reduce everything to anarchy, and even destroy the governing power and the Ruler himself. God hath a great realm to govern, not merely of men that dwell on the face of the earth, but beneath his sway there are angels, and principalities, and powers, and we do not know how many worlds of intelligent beings. It would certainly be a monstrous thing to suppose that God has made yonder myriads of worlds that we see sparkling in the sky at night without having placed some living creatures in them; it is far more reasonable to suppose that this earth is an altogether insignificant speck in the divine dominion, a mere province in the boundless empire of the King of kings. Now, this world having rebelled against God high-handedly, as it has done, unless there were a satisfaction demanded for its rebellion it would be a tolerated assault upon the dominion of the great Judge of all, and a lowering of his royal influence over all his domain. If sin in man's case were left unpunished it would soon be known through myriads of worlds, and in fact by ten thousand times ten thousand races of creatures, that they might sin with impunity; if one race had done so, why not all the rest? This would be a proclamation of universal license to rebel. It would probably be the worst calamity that could happen—that any sin should go unpunished by the supreme Judge. Sometimes in a state, unless the lawgiver executes the law against the murderer, life will be in peril, and everything will become insecure, and therefore it becomes mercy to write the death-warrant: so is it with God in reference to this world of sinners. It is his very love as well as his holiness

and his justice which, if I may use such a term, compels him to severity of judgment, so that sin cannot and must not be blotted out till atonement has been presented. There must first of all be a sacrifice for sin, which, mark you, the great Father, to show his love, himself supplies, for it is his own Son who is given to die, and so the Father himself supplies the ransom through his Son, that Son being also one with himself by bonds of essential unity, mysterious but most intense. If God demands the penalty in justice, he himself supplies it in love. 'Tis a wondrous mystery, this mystery of the way of salvation by an atoning sacrifice; but this much is clear, that now God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us, because satisfaction has been made to the injured honour of the divine government, and justice is satisfied. I want you to consider for a moment how readily God may now blot out sin since Christ hath died. The blotting out of sin seems hard till we see the cross, and then it appears easy enough. I have looked at sin till it seemed to blind me with its horror, and I said in myself, "This damned spot can never be washed out; no fuller's soap can change its hue; sooner might the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots. O sin, thou deep, eternal evil, what can remove thee?" And then I have seen the Son of God dying on the cross, and read the anguish of his soul, and heard the cries which showed the torment of his spirit when God his Father had forsaken him, and it has seemed to me as if the blotting out of sin were the easiest thing under heaven. When I have seen Jesus die I have not been able to understand how any sin could be difficult to remove. Let a man stand on Calvary and look on him whom he hath pierced, and believe and accept the atonement made, and it becomes the simplest thing possible that his debt should be discharged now that it is paid, that his freedom should be given now that the ransom is found, and that he should be no longer under condemnation, since the guilt that condemned him has been carried away by his great Substitute and Lord. It is then because of what Jesus Christ has suffered in our stead that God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us.

The second rendering of the text would be this, that God has forgiven us *because of the representative character of Christ*. It should never be forgotten that we originally fell by a representative. Adam stood for us, and he was our federal head. We did not fall personally at the first, but in our representative. Had he kept the conditions of the covenant we had stood through him, but, inasmuch as he fell, we fell in him. I pray you cavil not at the arrangement, because *there* lay the hope of our race. The angels probably fell individually, one by one, and hence they fell irretrievably,—there was no restoring them: but as we fell in one Adam, there remained the possibility of our rising in another Adam; and therefore in the fulness of time God sent forth his Son Jesus Christ, born of a woman, made under the law to become the second Adam. He undertook to remove our burdens and to fulfil the conditions of our restoration. According to covenant he must appear in our nature, and that nature in the fulness of time he assumed. He must bear the penalty: that he hath done in his personal suffering and death. He must obey the law: that he has done to the utmost. And now Christ Jesus, having borne penalty and fulfilled law, is himself justified before God, and stands forth

before God as the representative of all that are in him. God for Christ's sake has accepted us in him, has forgiven us in him, and looks upon us with love infinite and changeless in him. This is how all our blessings come to us—in and through Christ Jesus; and if we are indeed in him, the Lord doth not only forgive us our sin, but he bestows upon us the boundless riches of his grace in him: in fact, he treats us as he would treat his Son, he deals with us as he would deal with Jesus. Oh, how pleasant to think that when the just God looks upon us it is through the reconciling medium, he views us through the Mediator. We sometimes sing a hymn which says—

“Him and then the sinner see,
Look through Jesus' wounds on me,”

and this is just what the Lord doth. He counts us just for the sake of our Saviour's atonement, and because of his representative character.

Now go a little further. When we read “for Christ's sake” it surely means *for the deep love which the Father bears him*. My brethren, can you guess a little of the love which the Father hath toward the Only-begotten? We cannot pry into the wondrous mystery of the eternal filiation of the Son of God lest we be blinded by excess of light; but this we know, that they are one God,—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and the union which exists between them is intense beyond conception. “The Father loveth the Son,” was always true, and is true now; but how deeply, how intensely he loves the Son no mind can conceive. Now, brethren, the Lord will do great things for the sake of a Son whom he loves as he loveth Jesus, for in addition to the fact of his eternally loving him, as being one with him by nature and essence, there is now the superadded cause of love arising out of what the Lord Jesus hath done as the servant of the Father. Remember that our Lord Jesus has been obedient to his Father's will—obedient to death, even to the death of the cross, wherefore God hath highly exalted him and given him a name that is above every name. One of the sweetest thoughts, to my mind, which I sometimes suck at when I am alone, is this—that *God the Father will do anything for Christ*. Here is also another piece of a honeycomb—*when I can plead Christ's name I am sure to win my suit of him*. “For Christ's sake” is a plea that always touches the heart of the great God. Show that for you to receive such and such a blessing will glorify Christ, and the Father cannot withhold it, for it is his delight to honour Jesus. We speak after the manner of men, of course, and on such a theme as this we must be careful, but still we can only speak as men, being only men. It is the joy of the Father to express his love to his Son. Throughout all ages they have had fellowship one with another: they have always been one in all their designs, they have never differed upon any point, and cannot differ; and you notice when our Lord says, “Father, glorify thy Son,” he is so knit with the Father that he adds, “that thy Son also may glorify thee.” Their mutual love is inconceivably great, and, therefore, brethren, God will do anything for Jesus. God will forgive us for Christ's sake; yea, he has done so in the case of thousands around me. And thou, big black sinner, if thou wilt go to God at this moment and say, “Lord, I cannot ask thee to forgive me for my own

sake, but do it out of love for thy dear Son," he will do it, for he will do anything for the sake of Jesus. If thou art at this time conscious of sin so as to despair of thyself, it is well that thou shouldest be so, for self-despair is only common-sense, since there is nothing in thyself upon which thou canst rely. But do catch at this hope—it is not a straw, it is a good substantial life-buoy—if thou canst ask forgiveness for the sake of Jesus, God will do anything for Jesus, and he will do anything for thee for his dear sake.

So we read our text once more in the light of a truth which grows out of the love of God; namely, that *God does forgive sin for the sake of glorifying Christ*. Christ took the shame that he might magnify his Father, and now his Father delights to magnify him by blotting out the sin. If you can prove that any gift to you would reflect glory upon Christ, you may depend upon it you will have it. If there is anything under heaven that would make Christ more illustrious the Father would not spare it for a moment. If thou seest that for thee to have thy sin forgiven would raise the fame of the Saviour, go and plead that argument with God, and thou shalt surely prevail. Will it not make Christ glad if he saves such a sinner as thou art? Then go with this argument in thy mouth, "Father, glorify thy Son by exalting him as a glorious Saviour in saving me." I find this often a great lever at a dead lift,—to say unto the Lord, "Lord, thou knowest the straits I am in; thou knowest how undeserving I am; thou knowest what a poor, undone creature I am before thee; but if thy dear Son shall help and save me the very angels will stand and wonder at his mighty grace, and so *it will bring glory to him*, therefore I entreat thee be gracious unto me." Be sure thou art certain to prevail if thou canst plead that it will glorify Christ, and surely thou wouldest not wish to have a thing that would not glorify him. Thy prayer shall always be prevalent, if thy heart be in such a state that thou art willing to have or not to have, according as it will honour thy Lord: if it will not glorify Christ, be thou more than content to do without the choicest earthly good; but be thou doubly grateful when the boon that is granted tends to bring honour to the ever dear and worshipful name of Jesus. "For Christ's sake." It is a precious word; dwell upon it, and lay up this sentence in the archives of thy memory—the Father will do anything for the sake of Jesus Christ his Son.

II. Now, secondly, we pass on to observe what it is which we are told in the text has been done for us, and to us, for Christ's sake. "*God for Christ's sake* HATH FORGIVEN YOU."

First notice, that he has done this *certainly*. The apostle does not say he hopes so, but he says, "God for Christ's sake *hath* forgiven you." Are you in the number of the forgiven, my dear hearer? Hast thou believed in the Lord Jesus Christ? Then, as sure as you have believed, God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Have you put your trust in the atoning sacrifice? Then God for Christ's sake *hath* forgiven you. You have not begun to be a Christian, I hope, with the idea that one day, at some future period, you may obtain forgiveness. No. "God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Pardon is not a prize to be run for, but a blessing received at the first step of the race. If you have believed in Jesus your sin has all gone—all gone; all your sin has been erased

from the records of the past, never to be mentioned against you for ever. The moment a sinner looks to Christ, the burden of his sin rolls from off his shoulders never to return. If Christ hath washed thee, (and he has if thou hast believed in him,) then thou art clean every whit, and before the Lord thou standest delivered from every trace of guilt. Pardon is not a matter of hope, but a matter of fact. Expectation looks for many a blessing, but pardon is a realized favour which faith holds in her hand even now. If Christ took thy load, thy load cannot remain on thine own back : if Christ paid thy debts, then they do not stand in God's books against thee. How can they? It stands to reason that if thy Substitute has taken thy sin and put it away, thy sin lies no more on thee. God for Christ's sake hath forgiven thee. Get hold of that grand truth, and hold it, though all the devils in hell roar at thee. Grasp it as with a hand of steel ; grip it as for life : "God for Christ's sake hath forgiven me,"—may each one of us be able to say that. We shall not feel the divine sweetness and force of the text unless we can make a personal matter of it by the Holy Ghost.

Then notice that God has forgiven us *continuously*. He not only forgave us at the first all our sins, but he continues daily to forgive, for the act of forgiveness is a continuous one. I have sometimes heard it said that we were so forgiven when we first believed that there is no need to ask for further forgiveness ; to which I reply—We were so completely forgiven when we first believed that we ought continually to ask for the perpetuity of that one far-reaching act, that the Lord may continue to exert towards us that fulness of forgiving grace which absolved us perfectly at the first, that we may continue to walk before him with a sense of that complete forgiveness, clear and unquestioned. I know I was forgiven when first I believed in Christ ; and I am equally sure of it now : the one absolution continues to ring in my ears like joy-bells which never cease. Pardon once given continues to be given. When through doubt and anxiety I was not sure of my pardon, yet it was still true ; for he that believeth on him is not condemned, even though he may write bitter things against himself. Beloved friend, catch hold of that, and do not let it go. Divine pardon is a continuous act.

And this forgiveness on God's part was *most free*. We did nothing to obtain it by merit, and we brought nothing wherewith to purchase it. He forgave us for Christ's sake, not for aught that we had done. True, we did repent, and did believe, but repentance and faith he gave us, so that he did not forgive us for the sake of them, but purely of his own dear love, because he delighteth in mercy, and is never more like himself than when he passeth by transgression, iniquity, and sin.

Remember, also, that he forgave us *fully*. It was not here and there a sin that he blotted out, but the whole horrible list and catalogue of our offences he destroyed at once. The substitution of our Lord has finished that matter even to perfection :—

"Because the sinless Saviour died,
My sinful soul is counted free ;
For God, the Just, is satisfied
To look on him and pardon me."

All our transgressions are swept away at once, carried off as by a flood,

and so completely removed from us that no guilty trace of them remains. They are all gone ! O ye believers, think of this, for the all is no little thing : sins against a holy God, sins against his loving Son, sins against gospel as well as against law, sins against man as well as against God, sins of the body as well as sins of the mind, sins as numerous as the sands on the sea shore, and as great as the sea itself : all, all are removed from us as far as the east is from the west. All this evil was rolled into one great mass, and laid upon Jesus, and having borne it all he has made an end of it for ever. When the Lord forgave us he forgave us the whole debt. He did not take the bill and say, " I strike out this item and that," but the pen went through it all ;—PAID. It was a receipt in full of all demands. Jesus took the handwriting which was against us and nailed it to his cross, to show before the entire universe that its power to condemn us had ceased for ever. We have in him a full forgiveness.

And let it be remembered that this forgiveness which God has given us for Christ's sake is an *eternal* forgiveness. He will never rake up our past offences and a second time impute them. He will not find us on an evil day, and say, " I have had great patience with you, but now will I deal with you after your sins." Far otherwise ; he that believeth in Jesus hath everlasting life, and shall never come into condemnation. Irreversible is the pardon of heaven. " The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." He never repents what he has given, or forgiven. 'Tis done, 'tis done for ever : Jehovah absolves and the sentence stands fast for ever. " There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." " Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect ? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth ?" Blessed be God for eternal pardon !

And since I could not find a word to finish with but this one, I will use it : he hath *divinely* pardoned us. There is such a truth, reality, and emphasis in the pardon of God as you can never find in the pardon of man ; for though a man should forgive all you have done against him, if you have treated him very badly, yet it is more than you could expect that he should quite *forget* it, but the Lord says, " Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more for ever." If a man has played you false, although you have forgiven him, you are not likely to trust him again. It is an old proverb, " Never ride a broken-knee'd horse," and it is not a bad proverb either. But see how the Lord deals with his people. When Peter was set on his legs again he was a broken-knee'd horse enough, and yet see how gloriously the Lord rode that charger on the day of Pentecost. Did he not go forth conquering and to conquer ? The Lord lets bygones be bygones so completely that he trusts pardoned souls with his secrets, for " the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him " ; and he entrusts some of us with his choicest treasures, for Paul said, " He hath put me in trust with the gospel, though I was a blasphemer." He commits to our keeping that priceless casket which encloses the best hope of men, namely, the gospel of Jesus. " We have this treasure in earthen vessels." This shows how perfect is our forgiveness,—nay, I must put it, how *divine* is the forgiveness which we have received. Let us rejoice in that grand promise which comes to us by the mouth of Jeremiah of old, " In

those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve." Here is annihilation—the only annihilation I know of—the absolute annihilation of sin through the pardon which the Lord gives to his people. Let us sing it as though it were a choice hymn—"The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none."

III. Now, if you have drank into the spirit of our subject you will be strengthened to bear what I have to say to you upon a point of practice. "FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER, *even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*" Let me say, at the commencement, that I do not know of any one here present who has fallen out with anybody else, and therefore I shall make no personal allusions. If I did know of quarrels and bickerings it is very likely that I should say about the same, but I do not happen to know of any, and if, therefore, my remarks should come home, I would earnestly beg each one so affected to believe that what I say is intended for him, and to receive it as a pointed, personal message from God.

"Forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Now observe how the apostle puts it. Does he say "forgiving another"? No, that is not the text, if you look at it. It is "forgiving, *one another.*" One another! Ah, then that means that if you have to forgive to-day, it is very likely that you will yourself need to be forgiven to-morrow, for it is "forgiving *one another.*" It is turn and turn about, a mutual operation, a co-operative service. In fact, it is a joint-stock business of mutual forgiveness, and members of Christian churches should take large shares in this concern. "Forgiving one another." You forgive me, and I forgive you, and we forgive them, and they forgive us, and so a circle of unlimited forbearance and love goes round the world. There is something wrong about me that needs to be forgiven by my brother, but there is also something wrong about my brother which needs to be forgiven by me, and this is what the apostle means—that we are all of us mutually to be exercising the sacred art and mystery of forgiving one another. If we always did this we should not endure those who have a special faculty for spying out faults. There are some who, whatever church they are in, always bring an ill report of it. I have heard this sort of thing from many—"There is no love among Christians at all." I will tell you the character of the gentleman who makes that observation; he is both unloving and unlovely, and so he is out of the track of the pilgrims of love. Another cries, "There is no sincerity in the world now." That man is a hypocrite: be you quite sure of that. Judge a bird by its song, and a man by his utterance. The censorious measure our corn, but they use their own bushels. You may know very well what a man is by what he says of others. It is a gauge of character which very seldom will deceive you, to judge other men by their own judgment of their fellows. Their speech betrays their heart. Show me your tongue, sir! Now I know whether you are sick or well. He that speaketh with an ill tongue of his neighbour hath an ill heart; rest assured of that. Let us begin our Christian career with the full assurance that we shall have a great deal to forgive in other people, but that there will be a

great deal more to be forgiven in ourselves, and let us set our account upon having to exercise gentleness, and needing its exercise from others, "Forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

Note again. When we forgive, it is a poor and humble business compared with God's forgiving us, because we are only forgiving one another, that is, forgiving fellow-servants; whereas when God forgives us it is the Judge of all the earth forgiving, not his fellows, but his rebel subjects, guilty of treason against his majesty. For God to forgive is something great; for us to forgive, though some think it great, should be regarded as a very small matter.

Then reflect upon the matter to be forgiven. Our Lord in his parable tells us that the fellow-servant owed a few pence, but the servant himself was debtor to his master many talents. What we owe to God is infinite, but what our fellow creature owes to us is a very small sum. What did he do which has so much offended you? "He said a very shameful thing about me." It was very bad of him, no doubt. "Then he played me a very nasty trick, and acted very ungraciously; in fact, he behaved scandalously, and if you hear the story you will be quite indignant." Well, I am indignant. He is a bad fellow, there is no doubt about it; *and so are you*. So were you certainly when you first came to God; bad as he is to you, you have been much worse to the Lord. I will warrant that his blacks towards you are whites compared with your blacks in the presence of God. "Oh, but you would not believe how basely he acted." No, and I dare say I should hardly believe it if I heard how base you have been to the Lord; at any rate, it should make our eyes fill with tears to think how we have grieved our God, and vexed his Spirit. Some of us have had so much manifest forgiveness, so much outward sin forgiven, that for us to forgive ought to be as natural as to open our hands. After such forgiveness as the Lord has bestowed on some of us, we should be wicked servants indeed if we were to take our brother by the throat and say, "Pay me what thou owest." We should deserve to be given over to the tormentors by our angry Master if we did not count it joy to pass by a brother's fault.

If anyone here who is a Christian finds a difficulty in forgiveness, I am going to give him three words which will help him wonderfully. I would put them into the good man's mouth. I gave them to you just now, and prayed you to get the sweetness of them; here they are again! "*For Christ's sake.*" Cannot you forgive an offender on that ground? Ah, the girl has acted very shamefully, and you, her father, have said some strong things, but I beg you to forgive her for Christ's sake. Cannot you do it with that motive? It is true your son has behaved very wrongly, and nothing hurts a father's heart more than the wicked conduct of a son. You did in a fit of anger say a very stern thing, and deny him your house for ever. I entreat you to eat your words up for Christ's sake. Sometimes when I have been pleading a case like that, the person I have been persuading has kindly said, "I will do it for you, sir." I have said, "I will thank you if you will do it at all, but I would rather you would have said you would do it for my Master, for what a blessed Master he has been to you! Do it for his sake." I may be speaking very plainly home to some of you. I hope I am. If

there be any of you who have got into a bad state of heart and have said you never will forgive a rebellious son, do not say so again till you have looked at the matter, for Christ's sake. Not for the boy's sake, not for your neighbour's sake who has offended you, not for any other reason do I urge you to mercy, but for Christ's sake. Come, you two brothers, who have fallen out, love each other for Christ's sake ; come, you two sisters, come you two friends who have been alienated, get together directly, and end all your ill feeling for Christ's sake. You must not keep a drop of malice in your soul, for Christ's sake. Oh charming word, how it melts us, and as it melts it seems to leave no trace of anger behind it : for Christ's sake our love suffers long and never fails.

I do not know how to put this next word I am going to say. It is a paradox. You must forgive or you cannot be saved ; at the same time you must not do it from compulsion ; you must do it freely. There is a way of carrying this into practice, though I cannot explain it in words. You must forgive, not because you are forced to, but because you heartily do it. Remember, it is of no use for you to put your money into that offering box as you go out unless you remember first to forgive your brother. God will not accept the gifts, prayers, or praises of an unrelenting heart. Though you leave all your substance to his cause, he will not accept a penny of it if you die in an unforgiving temper. There is no grace where there is no willingness to overlook faults. John saith, "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" The very prayer that teaches you to ask for mercy bids you say "forgive us, as we forgive our debtors." Unless you have forgiven others you read your own death-warrant when you repeat the Lord's prayer.

Finally, I want to say to you all, brethren, that, as brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, if we are to forgive one another, there must be some other things which we ought to do. And the first is, do not let us provoke each other to offend. If I know that a man does not like a certain thing, I will not thrust it in his way. Do not say, "Well, but if he is short tempered, I cannot help it ; he should not be so ready to take offence. I cannot be always paying deference to his absurd sensitiveness." No ; but, brother, your friend is very ready to take offence, and you know that he is ; have respect, then, to his infirmity of temper, such as you would have if he were afflicted in body. If you have rheumatism or gout, your friends do not go stamping across the room and saying, "He ought not to mind that ; he ought not to feel it." Kind-hearted people step across the floor with a light step, for fear they should hurt the poor suffering limb. If a man has a diseased mind and is very irritable, treat him gently, pity his infirmity, and do not irritate him. A friend wrote me a short while ago a letter of serious complaint against a brother who had been very angry with him, and had spoken very sharply while excited to passion. I felt bound to hear the other side of the story, and I was obliged to say, "Now, you two brothers are both wrong. You, my brother, lost your temper ; but you, my other brother, irritated him, so that I do not wonder he did lose his temper. And when you saw he had lost his temper why did you not go away, or do something to quiet him ? No, but you remained to increase the wrath, and then wrote to expose

him." I blame the wood for burning, but what shall I say of the bellows? It was wrong to blaze, but was it right to fan the flame? Very often when a man is angry he may not be the only one to blame. Therefore, brothers and sisters, if we are to forgive each other, do not let us provoke each other to offend.

In the next place, do not make offences. Oftentimes a man has been offended at another for no reason at all. One person has said of another as he passed him in the street, "He will not even nod to me. He is too proud to own me, because I am a poor man." Now, that beloved friend who was thus blamed could not see much further than his hand, for he was shortsighted. Another has been censured for not hearing, though he was deaf, and another for not shaking hands when his arm was crippled. Do not imagine offences where they are not intended.

Next, do not take offences where they are intended. It is a splendid thing if you will not be offended. Nothing makes a man feel so small as when you accept what he intended for an insult as if it were a compliment, and thank him for it. Can you master yourself to that point? Remember, when you have conquered yourself you have conquered the world. You have overcome everybody when you have so fully overcome your own spirit that you remain content with that which naturally would excite your wrath.

Then, if you must be offended, dear brother, do not exaggerate an offence. Some good *women*, I was about to say, and *men* also, when they come as tale-bearers with a charge, make a great many flourishes and additions. They go a long way round, and they bring innumerable beliefs, and suggestions, and hints, and hearsays into the business, until a midge's egg becomes as huge as ever was laid by an ostrich. I begin coolly to strip off the feathers and the paint, and I say, "Now, I do not see what that point had to do with it, or what that remark has in it:—all I can see when I come to look at the bare fact is so-and-so, and that was not much, was it?" "Oh, but there was more intended." Do not believe that, dear brother, dear sister. If there must be something wrong, let it be as little as you can. If you have a telescope, look through the large hole and minify instead of magnifying, or, better still, do not look at it at all. A blind eye is often the best eye a man can have, and a deaf ear is better by far than one which hears too much. "Also take no heed," says Solomon, "unto all words that are spoken, lest thou hear thy servant curse thee." Something you have done may irritate a servant, and he may make remarks which are unbecoming and impertinent. Don't hear what he is muttering. Keep out of hearing. He will be sorry to-morrow, and if he thinks you did not hear him he will continue in your service and be faithful to you. What would *you* do if *your* master picked you up for every word, and if he caught up every sentence that you uttered? How would you live at all if he reckoned sharply with you? No, dear friends, as you have to forgive one another, do not take offence, and when offence is given do not exaggerate it, and, if you can, do not even observe it.

Then, again, do not publish offences. There has been something very offensive said. What then? Do not repeat it. Do not go first to one, and then to another, and say, "Now this is quite private, and

mind you keep it a secret ; So-and-so has spoken shamefully." Better that you should let your heart break than go up and down with a fire-brand in this fashion. If a brother has done wrong why should you do wrong? You will be doing wrong if you publish his fault. Remember how the curse came upon Noah's son for exposing his father ; and how much better it is for us all when there is anything wrong to go backward and cover it, without even looking at it ourselves, if we can help it. Cover it up : cover it up. Charity covereth a multitude of sins. Not only one, two, three sins will charity cover, but she carries a cloak which covereth a whole host of faults.

Above all, my brethren, and with this I close, never in any way, directly or indirectly, avenge yourselves. For any fault that is ever done to you, the Master says unto you,—resist not evil. In all things bend, bow, yield, submit. "If you tread on a worm it will turn," says somebody. And is a worm *your* example? Christ shall be mine. It is a shocking thing when a Christian man forgets his Lord to find an excuse for himself among the poor creatures under his feet. But if it must be so, what does a worm do when it turns? When you have trodden on a worm, does it bite? Does the worm hurt any one? Ah, no. It has turned, but it has turned in its agony and writhed before you, that is all. You may do that, if you must. Brother, the most splendid vengeance you can ever have is to do good to them that do you evil, and to speak well of them that speak ill of you. They will be ashamed to look at you ; they will never hurt you again if they see that you cannot be provoked except it be to greater love and larger kindness. This ought to be the mark of Christians ; not "I will have the law of you," or "I will avenge myself," but "I will bear and forbear even to the end." "Vengeance is mine. I will repay it, saith the Lord." Do not take that into your hand which God says belongs to him, but as he for Christ's sake has forgiven you, so also forgive all those who do you wrong. "How long am I to do that?" says one. "I would not mind doing it three or four times." There was one of old who would go the length of six or seven, but Jesus Christ said "unto seventy times seven." That is a very considerable number. You may count whether you have yet reached that amount, and if you have you will now be glad to begin again, still forgiving, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you. God help us to be patient to the end. Though I have not just now been preaching Christ Jesus as the object of the sinner's trust, yet remember that he must also be the object of our imitation. This is the kind of doctrine which Christ himself preached, and therefore, since he preached continually this love to our neighbour, and forgiveness of our enemies, we ought both to preach and to practise it. Go ye and believe in him, and be imitators of him, remembering that he forgave his murderers upon the cross whereon he wrought out our redemption. May his Spirit rest upon you evermore. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Ephesians iv.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—621, 566, 559.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A VILE WEED AND A FAIR FLOWER.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Let your conversation be without covetousness ; and be content with such things as ye have : for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”—Hebrews xiii. 5, 6.

Is it not deeply humiliating, beloved friends, that the best of Christians should need to be cautioned against the worst of sins? May the consecrated become covetous? Is it possible that the regenerate may drivell into misers? Alas, what perils surround us, what tendencies are within us! Although a man may be a sincere believer in the self-sacrificing Jesus, yet it is needful to say to him, “Let your conversation be without covetousness.” Covetousness is a vice of a very degrading kind, and it is therefore the more surprising that those who have a renewed nature, and in whom the Spirit of God dwells, should require to be warned against bowing down their souls before it, and yet such is the necessity that once and again the saints are warned against “covetousness, which is idolatry.” As long as Israel is in the wilderness she is not out of danger from the golden calf. There is no superfluous text in the Bible; had there been no peril, there would have been no precept; but, alas, the best of saints may be betrayed into the basest sins. Moreover, the common talk of the people, with whom we daily mingle in business, is so much about buying and selling and getting gain that we are apt to be entangled in their nets and find ourselves in the meshes of their craft before we are well aware of it. It is hard to live where greed grasps all, and not to try to save a little for ourselves out of the wreck. “Take heed and beware of covetousness,” is a needful caution for these latitudes.

It appears from our text that the children of God need also to be exhorted to cherish that most simple and natural of virtues—contentment. One would think that, at least in some instances, they would have this good thing as a matter of course. Among our villagers we have met with persons so well satisfied with their lowly lot that they would not cross the sea to gain an empire. Yet their contentment has

sprung up wild as the daisies and buttercups of their own meadows, for they have not been acquainted with the truth as it is in Jesus, or the blessed hope which makes trials light to bear. Do Christians, then, need to be admonished with precepts, and stimulated with promises, to make them yield the commonplace virtues of life? Do their fields refuse to grow "the herb called heartsease," which simple folk have gathered unsown from their little garden-plots? Must believers be exhorted with earnestness if you would have them contented? It is even so. Against the worst of vices they need to be warned, and towards the humblest of virtues they need to be exhorted. O Lord, thou knowest us better than we know ourselves, for thou understandest what poor, faulty things even thine own children are. The best of men are men at the best. Unless the grace of God had engaged to keep them every moment, and to defend them from the temptations of their many foes, they would long ago have utterly perished from the way. Great need have they to say, "The Lord is my helper," for if he be not so, they will fall a prey to covetousness and discontent.

At this time I have to address you, not upon some high and lofty theme, but upon a simple matter of every-day life. Here in this sublime epistle, which tells us of the person of Christ—the glory of his sonship and the grandeur of his priesthood—here in this storehouse of interpretation, which opens up the most cherished statutes and ordinances of the Old Testament, only to show how they fade and vanish before the excellence of the New Covenant; here, I say, in this epistle to the Hebrews, we find ourselves charged to avoid a vice which reason itself should cause us to abhor, and challenged to exhibit a virtue which nature itself should commend to us. Plain is the sailing; the rock is conspicuous, shun covetousness; the haven is open, anchor in content. Yet need we even here the teaching of the Holy Spirit, that we may shun covetousness and cultivate contentment. Plain and pointed are the words, "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have": may our lives as plainly show these commands written out in act and deed by the Holy Ghost.

Our discourse, therefore, like the text which dictates it, must run out in three distinct branches. There is a *covetousness* to be eschewed, a *contentment* to be entertained, and a *confidence* to be established: this last is referred to in the words,—“So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”

I. First, I shall have to say a little about COVETOUSNESS. We are told that our conversation is to be "without covetousness." The term "conversation" includes, as you know, the whole of our lives. It is true that we are not to *talk* covetously, but conversation means far more than speech; it includes thoughts, words, and actions: in fact, the whole of life.

Taking the first meaning of conversation, namely, *talk*, we ought not in our words to be on the side of those who grip for wealth or growl for wage, who grasp for power or grind the poor. We ought not in our talk to take part with the churl and the illiberal. If we hear of a mean transaction, and it is called a sharp stroke of business and commended as something clever, we are not to sanction it even with a smile; but make our looks and our language alike discountenance over-reaching

and oppression. The skinning of flints and the driving of screws are practised by many people as if they were positively meritorious, and there are those who, while they would shrink from doing aught so questionable themselves, will smile at the crooked policy of others, perhaps feebly blaming the fraud, but all the while admiring the cateness which carried it out and pocketed the result. With satiric praise instead of severe censure, they will say, "Wonderful man that! Nobody can ever get on the blind side of his head. He can get blood out of gateposts, and profits out of losses." Those who praise sharpers are the patrons of thieves. Never think that dexterity will condone deceit, or cleverness excuse a lie. Let your conversation savour of grace and generosity, and of kindness altogether unselfish: and never let it flatter the successful trickster or the greedy grinder of the needy. Never let your language be such as might help to sharpen the cunning of a Laban or sanction the churlishness of a Nabal. This be far from you. "Let your conversation be without covetousness."

But our conversation has to do with our *actions* as well as our words. The sugar of words is sickening if it be not attended with the honey of deeds. Let our whole life in our dealings with our fellow men be moved by liberal principles, and enriched with a generous spirit. Let us be full of kindness, full of thoughtfulness, full of a desire that others may live as well as ourselves—that our coming into a country may not be like the coming of the Tartar's horse, of which it is said that no grass will grow where once it sets its foot. The miser is a creature too hungry, too greedy, too ravenous, to allow any other cattle to feed after him; he makes the land barren, by gnawing the very roots out of the ground. There are some whose whole life is the use of the rake to scrape everything to themselves, and these men leave nothing for others, however honest and industrious they may be. This is not Christ-like, nor will Christ own one who thus lives to himself. Let your actions, then, in trade and labour, as well as your words, be without covetousness.

But this will not do unless the word "conversation" takes in our *desires*, our projects, our plans, our thoughts. We must be without covetousness within, for if that vice reigns in the soul it is sure to rule in the life. Our prayer should be that of David, "Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness." Why is a man miserly in his actions? Why, because he is miserable in his thoughts. If the inner man were right, the outer man could not be wrong. Beloved, may God cleanse our way, both in private and in public, from anything like greed, that we may be obedient to the text, "Let your conversation be without covetousness."

It is so very easy a thing to be covetous, that no class of society is free from it. A man may be very poor and covetous withal, and a man may be exceedingly rich and still may think that he is not half rich enough. It is not possible to satisfy the greedy. If God gave them one whole world to themselves they would cry for another; and if it were possible for them to possess heaven as they now are, they would feel themselves in hell, because others were in heaven too, for their greed is such that they must have everything or else they have nothing. Unless they can call all things theirs, they are as

miserable as Haman, who, although all Shushan bowed before him, was not content, because one poor Jew who sat in the gate would not pay him homage. A covetous spirit can enter anywhere, and can live anywhere. It is necessary that we search ourselves, lest the wretched lust of greed should fix itself upon us; for, remember, it can live in one room in a back street, but it can also live in the most sumptuous mansion of Belgravia; it can starve itself to save a shilling, and it can indulge itself in all manner of extravagance to grasp a fortune. Covetousness has many ways of manifesting itself; and the text does not warn us against one of those ways, but against them all. "Let your conversation be without covetousness."

I have said that covetousness has many ways of showing itself; let me mention some of them. In some it is most seen in *repining and complaining* against their lot. God has so circumstanced them that they scarcely ever have more than barely enough. They have struggled to rise, but they have never succeeded; probably because they have not the capacity for so doing. There must be people in the world to take the rough side of it, and these men are evidently of the number, for although they are anxious to make head-way in the world, yet they never rise an inch. Now, if we know our lot, it is idle to refuse it. If we do so, our conversation is not without covetousness; we are not satisfied with the things that we have. We are not satisfied with our heavenly Father's will, nor willing that he should be Father and that we should be children. We have not learned to say, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." Here is the neglected part of our education, and we must go to school again to the Holy Spirit. There are some complaining ones who would be no happier if their lot were changed. If they were lifted from a cottage to a palace they would repine still, for repining is far more a matter of the heart than of the condition; and a mind that has not bowed to the will of God in one place would be rebellious also in another, and would rebel still. There be some who have all that heart could wish who still murmur, and still think that God deals hardly with them. This disease is born and bred in our very bones, and it needs the grace of God to get it out of us. It is ill when it shows itself in a perpetual fault-finding with all that providence appoints, in always grumbling that we are left out in the cold, as if in every distribution of divine love we came in for the last portion and the least share, and were doomed to be the forgotten ones of the family. Shake off that spirit, beloved. God help us all to get rid of every particle of it, for it savours not of grace, but it is earthly, sensual, devilish.

In some others this covetous principle shows itself in *envying others*. If others are better off, or more esteemed, they straightway seem to regard them as enemies, cannot think well of them, cannot wish them well, would almost rejoice to see them dragged down. I have known some rich persons that were very proud; I have known some poor people who were prouder still: and their envying of those who were better off has developed in them a pride of an almost ferocious character, akin to the fury of savages. Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous, but who is able to stand before envy? Now, if I envy a man, I am clearly guilty of covetousness, for I wish that something which he has were not

his, but mine. And that may happen to you when you do not think about his property. You may be covetous of his gifts. Somebody in the little school to which you belong can address the children better than you: do you ever catch yourself feeling jealous of him? Go before God and weep over it, and pray the feeling down. Possibly you are a minister, and alas, even with us this wretched feeling will come in. Some star outshines ours, and we are likely to be eclipsed, and straightway we are covetous of our honour. We do not like it, brethren, but if we were right at heart with God as we ought to be we should glory in being excelled by our fellow-servants; we should be glad for our heavenly Father to be better served than we can serve him, and for the church of God to have more valued servants in it than we are ever likely to be. This is not easy, because envy preys upon us, that compound of meanness and malice, that vilest reptile of the old serpent's brood, This ill-natured vice shows itself generally in finding fault. Of course our brethren are not perfect; but why should we take a delight in pointing out their peculiarities, their eccentricities, or their shortcomings? If they win a great many to Christ the question is sceptically mooted, "But how will their converts wear?" What makes us raise the question? Is it brotherly love? If throngs gather around them, we say, "Ah, they are a nine days' wonder: that little excitement will soon pass off." Is it grace or envy which makes us hope so? Perhaps we complain that they are very young. This, I suppose, they cannot help; we were once young ourselves, and would like to be so still. Or else we say, on the other hand, they have passed their meridian, and if they flourish for a little while, their sun is setting, and it is not much they will ever achieve. Ah, greed of honour, what is there which thou wilt not say? Would God that Christians would cease from tearing one another! Let your conversation be without that covetousness which shows itself in envy. If the Lord has given you one talent, use it; but do not waste your time in finding fault with him who has five talents. If your Master makes you a hewer of wood, throw your strength into your felling and cleaving, do not throw the axe at your fellow-servant; and if he makes you a drawer of water, do not empty your buckets on your neighbour, but do your own service well, and bring what you have done and lay it at your Master's feet. This will be thankworthy: this will be Christlike. You will then be obeying the injunction, "Let your conversation be without covetousness."

And covetousness may show itself in another way, namely, by *perpetually craving and desiring that which we have not*. The old moralists used to say that the man who would be truly rich had better retrench his appetites than increase his fortune. Some men seem as if they never could fix their thoughts on what they *have*, but they are always in the other tense and mood, thinking of what they could, would, or should have. They have swallowed the two daughters of Solomon's horseleech, and these continually cry, "Give, give." They must have something more: their desires are boundless, the sea is not more ready to swallow up all that it can come at. A little more they told us would content them some years ago, and a great deal more has been added to their stores, but still they want a little more now. Let your conver-

sation be without covetousness in that respect, and be content with such things as ye have.

In many—perhaps in the most numerous class—this anxiety for acquisition betrays itself in *fretful fears about the future*; and I must in all honesty grant that this form of the vice has sometimes the appearance of being the most excusable of the whole. “What shall I do,” we are apt to say, “in case I should be laid aside, and a precarious income should suddenly come to an end? It is not for myself alone: it is for my wife and numerous family that I am chiefly concerned—how could they be provided for?” Many a man lies awake at night desiring to increase his income, not because he is ambitious to be rich, but because he is haunted with the fear of being poor. Gifted, perhaps, for the present with competency, he is still scared with dire forebodings—“What will become of my family if I die?” “Or should such and such a source of income be dried up, and it is very precarious, what then will become of my household? What then?” Full many are not content with such things as they have because the dread of a distant season of trial is constantly harassing them. They cannot be happy in the present sunshine because mayhap a storm is brewing out of sight. They cannot lie down in peace because they want to lay up against a rainy day. In vain for them their table is bountifully spread unless they have a store in hand against every contingency that may happen.

Do you notice how precious is that promise which provides for all possible casualties that may befall you? “He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” The censure, therefore, falls where this sacred pledge is unheeded; and he is accounted covetous who walks after the cravings of the flesh rather than after the counsel of the Spirit of God. If God would have thee live by the day, why dost thou want to gather enough for seven days at once? If thy Father bids thee trust him, why dost thou distrust his paternal care? Use prudent thrift by all means; do not waste what he gives, nor heedlessly forget that you will have wants on the morrow as well as to-day; but abstain from fretfulness, abjure murmuring, and abhor every tendency to unbelief, lest you provoke him to anger:—

“Commit thou all thy griefs
And ways unto his hands;
To his sure truth, and tender care,
Who earth and heaven commands.”

He would not have you careful about those earthly things after which the Gentiles seek. “Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.” “Let your conversation be without covetousness.”

This covetousness is a great and crying evil. It is expressly forbidden in the law. It has a commandment all to itself: “Thou shalt not covet.” O brother, wouldst thou wish to fly into an evil which the Lord himself accounts so gross that he has branded it across the brow with one of the ten commands of the decalogue: “Thou shalt not covet”?

Covetous people, I have often observed, are classed in Scripture with the worst of criminals. How revolting to be included in such bad company! Here in this very chapter we read, “Whoremongers and adulterers

God will judge. Let your conversation be without covetousness." Thus covetousness is classed with the very filthiest of vices of the flesh. In another place the apostle says "covetousness, which is idolatry"; and thus it is identified with a loathsome impurity of the spirit. Let the Christian dread it. God is not selfish, God is love: God hoards not, he giveth liberally; he refuses not the poor, he delighteth in mercy. He spreads abroad in the midst of his creatures the good things which belong to him, and he bids them freely gather what he freely gives; even thus would he have us distribute generously and disperse freely without covetousness.

Covetousness is an evil thing, it leads to all sorts of evil; and it is especially evil in times of persecution. The apostle knew that men who loved the world, and hugged it, were not the men to stand fast for God in the day of trial. Those who had the greatest fondness for worldly wealth were the first to turn aside, and forsake the Saviour, when they had to undergo losses and crosses for his name's sake.

Covetousness is a deadly poison, destructive of all virtue; it dries up the milk of human kindness in a man's breast, and makes him hard, callous, indifferent towards the needs of his fellow creatures. How much infamy it fosters! The man whose heart is set on covetousness will do anything for gold: he will venture to stain his hands with blood itself if he may but gain it. I scarcely know any other vice which can more effectually damn its victim: and I speak the more earnestly about it because covetousness can readily enter into a man's heart, and he may not know it. St. Francis de Sales, said that many came to him to confess all manner of sins, and many of them of a glaring nature; but that all his life long he never knew anybody acknowledge covetousness. Do you exclaim, "I wonder why this is?" Well, it is because a man does not like to think that he can be covetous; he cannot bring himself to acknowledge that he has quite gone that length. When his avarice is the most heartless he generally calls it by a prettier name, such as prudence, thrift, or carefulness, so as to make it look more respectable. There is a great propensity about gold and silver, and houses and lands, to stick to one's heart and blind the judgment. It is difficult for those who have much to do with wealth to be quite clear of self. Some men, by divine grace, get much, and give much, and use the world, and do not abuse it: but it is of the earth earthy after all, and when it comes into contact with these hearts of ours it will corrupt and corrode. He that has this world's goods has need to watch himself lest his possessions should injure him; and he that has them not had need to watch himself lest his indigence should injure him. There is an evil that cometh by either the having or the not having. And let each man, therefore, be on his guard against it while he listens to the warning voice of the apostle, "Let your conversation be without covetousness."

II. Secondly, as there is a vice to be shunned so there is a virtue to be sought. The theme is more pleasing now that we speak upon CONTENTMENT. "Be content with such things as ye have."

It is, after all, no very great virtue if we should attain it: the more pity, therefore, if we should miss it. The old moralists constantly twit us with the fact that we may have the necessaries of life upon very

easy terms, whereas we put ourselves to great pains for its luxuries. There have been contented persons whose heads have been clear, their hearts simple, and their habits temperate, though they have not known the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We ought surely then to rise to that low average of sanctity in which our moderation shall be known unto all men.

To be content with such things as we have should be specially easy to us, because we have so much to be thankful for, such constant communications from the great Benefactor, and so certain an assurance that he will withhold no good thing from those that walk uprightly. I am not speaking now of those who have houses and land and goods in abundance, for their repinings are discord indeed; but I speak of all Christians. This world is ours, and worlds to come. Earth is our lodge, and heaven our home. It ought to be easy for us to be contented since all things are ordered for our good. Arranged by our own dear Father's hand, his appointments ought not to be difficult for a loving child to approve. The trial of our faith will soon be over; a long life of affliction is but a pin's point of time. Be it never so painful, we ought to be willing to bear the light affliction, which is but for a moment. We know that God loves us, for we feel his love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. Should not contentment be easy under such circumstances?

They say, "There is nothing ill that is well taken," and that is the testimony of a heathen: but that no harm can come of that which our God means for our good is quite certain. With his sorest chastisements often come to us his sweetest caresses. Beyond this lower sky, when this brief day is over, we shall be rich to all the intents of bliss. We have a heritage which will require everlasting ages to unfold: we have a treasure laid up which fancy cannot paint, whereof it would sound fabulous to tell. Do we grope just now in darkness? Yet are we children of the day! In reversion now, in possession soon, are the things that are to be revealed to us; and they are far more real than aught we have ever seen with these mortal eyes. It ought not to be a difficult thing for us to be contented here for this brief hour. "What does it matter?" says a traveller, "I shall only stay here one night, I shall be up and away in the morning." And what does it matter to us, brothers and sisters? Till the day break, and the shadows flee away, we may put up with a few hard things, for we may be where our Lord is in his glory within the twinkling of an eye.

True contentment is absolutely essential to happiness. There is a plant called selfishness, and if you will pull it up by its roots you will find that it grows in the soil of misery. Were self completely renounced, and Christ fully received as all in all, sorrow would be so sweetly accepted by us that the sting of it would be taken away. We must be satisfied with what God appoints, or else we shall be constantly the prey of discomfort and the victims of disappointment. O Christian men and women, will ye not seek to be content with such things as ye have?

I believe that contentment depends very much upon taking right views of things. There is, to wit, a *short view*. To live by the day is the way to be cheerful. If you try to live by the month you will bring home a

month's troubles to eat up a day's meat. God has not constructed his people to live by the month: their souls, like their bodies, are fashioned to live by the day. His supplies, his promises, the very prayers he puts into our mouths, all deal with days: "Give us this day our daily bread." "As thy days so shall thy strength be." Live by the day, then, and you will be content.

Take also *long views* as well as short views. Take the view which says, "It will be all the same a hundred years hence." Take the view which says, "We shall soon laugh at this present little vexation." Take that distant view which says, "When I get to heaven, this great trial will seem very small: when I look from the hill-tops of glory at my present dilemma, it will probably cause me many a smile, to think that I should have been so vexed and tormented by it." Take this view of things—that a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things that he possesses. Full often the more your goods increase the more your cares multiply; the care to keep is often greater than the care to win; while, after all, the care rightly to use ought to be the most weighty care of all. If thy God has loaded a neighbour with ten thousand a-year, thank God that he has not burdened thee in that way. Be glad if he has given thee as much as thou canst carry easily, and no more. When I go for a walk, I like a staff,—just one, but I should not like to be compelled to carry a hundred. Some men appear to me to have a hundred times as much as they can possibly want, and so they are hampered with what might, in moderation, have been their help. Be not eager for great riches, nor seek after large domains in this world, lest thou wallow in wealth, stick in it as in a bog, and drown thy soul. Why load thyself with more clay when thou hast as much to carry now as thou canst well get along with? Be not surprised, therefore, any of you, but rather be thankful if God doth sometimes lighten your load a little to quicken your pace in the heavenly journey.

The secret of true contentment, and the way to get at it, is admirably expressed in these words, "Be content with such things as ye have, for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Some of the most easy-going people in the world are those who have a government pension of so much a month. It is little, but it is sure. If all the banks break, they will get it. They have no trouble as to how the markets fluctuate, or how different stocks rise and fall in value; or what dividends they might derive from investments. It is not a large income that falls to their lot, 'tis true; but then it is all they require, and it is always sure. You say to such a person, "You may set your heart at rest because your supplies come from a sure source." Now, then, that is exactly where the child of God stands: for ye know who hath said—"Thy bread shall be given thee, and thy water shall be sure." Between now and heaven I do not know who may starve; but I never shall, because the Lord is my Shepherd, and I shall not want. Those clever lawyers, those sharp-teethed schemers, those greedy oppressors, those young lions may lack and suffer hunger; but they that fear the Lord shall not want any good thing. The Christian man's fortune is made. "Oh, but he may be in great straits." Yes, but he shall be supplied in due time. All that he needs in this time state his heavenly Father will give him. He wants but faith to believe this, and

he shall find it to be really so: "for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." God's word ought to be taken as truth itself. A promise from the mouth of God is better than a bond signed and sealed by the wealthiest of men. No negotiable securities can be comparable in value to this declaration of the Lord, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." It is put very strongly. In the original there are five negatives, as in the verse you sang just now:—

"The soul that on Jesus hath lean'd for repose,
I will not, I will not, desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake."

The five negatives in the last line of that verse correspond with the five placed in this text—"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." It means that in no one single instance will the Lord leave thee, nor in any one particular will he leave thee, nor for any reason will he leave thee. If thou hast cast thyself upon his infinite power and grace, he will carry thee to the end. Not only will he not desert thee altogether, but he will not leave thee even for a little while. He may seem for a small moment to hide his face from thee, but he will still love thee and still supply thy needs. Behind the wall he will pour oil upon the flame if in the front of the wall he permits Satan to throw water upon it. He will feed thee somehow—by the back door, if not by the front—by the ravens if not by the doves. If the brook Cherith fails, he will find a widow woman, even in a distant land, who in all her straits shall, nevertheless, feed the servant of God.

"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Surely we cannot fail to be contented if we do but get fast hold of this promise. Are you not always in the divine presence? Saith he not "I will never leave thee." No carpet on the floor, no paper on the walls; no pictures, no furniture—the room mean and unsightly. Yes, but suppose God is there, what matters it? Buckingham Palace has not a drawing-room to compare with that little room upstairs against the thatch, or with that garret where you cannot stand upright, where the stars peep in at night between the tiles. If God be there, I would sooner live in the worst cottage's worst room, on the pittance of the parish, than where the floor was paved with marble and the richest hangings adorned the ample chambers but the divine glory was unknown. If God be there—"I will never leave thee"—then wherever the child of God is cast, there is a glory round about him which makes him sublime in the midst of his poverty.

"I will not forsake thee," he adds: by which I understand that, as he will not withdraw his presence, so will he not withhold his help. "I want," say you. "I want, I want." Go on with the list. "I want—a thousand things." "I will not forsake thee," says he. "I will see thee through the trial; I will carry thee over the difficulty. I will bear thee on. I will lift thee over. I will bring thee out. I will abide with thee to the end. I will not leave thee nor forsake thee." Is not that enough for thy faith to feed on? What more dost thou want? Suppose he had said, "I will send my angels with thee," or, "I

will move all mankind to help thee," it would not come to so much in its real meaning as this. "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*"

But when did God originally say this? Well, you cannot find the exact words in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, but he did say the same in effect to Jacob at Bethel, and to Joshua before he went to the invasion of Canaan; David said it in the Lord's name to Solomon, and Isaiah said the same to the whole people of God. Whatever God says to one saint he says, virtually, to all saints who have like faith. This renders the Bible such a rich storehouse of comfort to us. No Scripture is of private interpretation, but all Scripture is given for our personal appropriation. No promise is hedged about as the exclusive property of the one man who received it. If thou be of like character and in like case, thou mayest, O believer, take the Lord's words to others as being spoken to thyself. Thou mayest plead a promise which God made to Joshua or to Jacob with just as much confidence as if he had made it especially to thee. Remember this, and be content with such things as ye have.

III. Our last point, upon which our time will only admit of a word or two, is the CONFIDENCE with which we may encourage ourselves and bid defiance to a frowning world. "So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man can do unto me."

This promise of the Lord is fitted to nerve us with courage, as well as to solace us with contentment. Chicken-hearts and craven fears ill become the disciples of Christ. If we are oppressed, or if we have to encounter opposition, we may just go straight ahead in the strength of our text, and say, "What can man do unto me?" If God be our helper, dear brethren, why should we shrink or falter; why should we droop or look dismayed; why should we hold our peace or speak with bated breath? Are there any of you who are afraid to confess my Lord's name before men, to enlist in his service, to buckle on his armour, to avow yourselves his followers? Parley no longer, I beseech you, with such ungracious fears. Great thoughts have stirred within your breasts while we have presented the consoling word, and the Spirit of God has rested upon it. Be great in act as you have been in thought. Since he has said, "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,*" why are you ashamed to come and own him? "I am afraid I might dishonour his name," say you. But he has said, "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*" "I am very weak," say you. He has said, "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*" "I might bring dishonour upon the church to which I should unite myself." Very likely you would if he left you, but he has said, "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*" It is always safe to do what God bids. There can be no sound policy in neglecting a divine precept. So come forward and say boldly, "The Lord is my helper."

Possibly some of you have been persecuted. Hard names have been hurled at you: I hope you did not cry because of that. Poor child of God, thy strength is very small if thou art afraid of an ugly name. We have had a good many in our time; they have not broken any of *our* bones, nor will they injure *you*. "Oh, but you do not know what the chaff of the shop is." No, but give them some of your wheat in return. Let them see how a Christian can bear and forbear

when their fun grows foul; how he can endure reproach for righteousness' sake. You will be master of the situation yet. "Alas, sir, but I am threatened with the loss of my situation unless I will go contrary to divine commands." Then do not flinch, but tell your heavenly Father all about it. Commit your cause to him. Let not fifty places or five hundred people make you swerve from the course that faith dictates and duty demands. Appeal to God, and he will provide for you. Any temporary loss you may sustain will be much more than made up in the prosperity he awards you: or if not in that way, in the peace he vouchsafes you and the honour he confers on you in suffering for Christ's sake.

Oh that this very night the veil might be taken off many faces, the burden unloaded from many shoulders, and fear dispelled from many hearts! If you have cast off your grievous disquietudes while I have been talking, do not put them on again when you get outside. I have known many a poor tried child of God forget his trouble when he was sitting here, but he looked it up before he reached his home, and so he returned to his old condition. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee. He will never suffer the righteous to be moved." You have been looking too far ahead, dear brother. Cure that fault by looking further still. Recollecting the coming of our Lord, and the joy of his appearing, you may ease your pains in the present. Oh to live exempt from care by the energy of prayer! Oh, to believe in God implicitly, to rest in him calmly, to trust in Christ steadfastly, and to take his yoke upon us cheerfully: then we shall find rest to our souls by learning of him. The Lord help us all to do so, for his name's sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hebrews xiii. 1—14;
Philippians iv. 8—14.

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THE IMMOVEABILITY OF THE BELIEVER.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, DECEMBER 22ND, 1878, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever."—Psalm cxxv. 1.

THIS is the first verse of one of the Songs of degrees. These Songs were probably sung by the pilgrims as they went up to Jerusalem, when they halted at the various stations or passed certain places of interest. It is very possible that this psalm burst forth from joyful lips at the moment when Zion first came into sight, and the worshippers gazed upon the city of their solemnities. Happy pilgrims! They had left behind them many a dreary glen and dangerous wood, and now they saw full in their view their journey's end and therefore they sang with all the gathered joy of days gone by. They could not so have exulted if they had not previously sorrowed. The same truth may be learned from the use of the term "Song of degrees:" it warns us that this psalm rises out of that which preceded it, as one step of a staircase rises above its fellow. David had not sung the one hundred and twenty-fifth psalm if he had not first learned to sing the one hundred and twenty-fourth: if he had not been where men threatened to swallow him up quick, and found in such a case that the Lord was on his side, he could not have been quite so sure that "they that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed." Our experiences are our instructors even concerning themselves: they shed light upon each other, and we learn enough from one trial to begin to unfold the mysteries of another. The one hundred and twenty-fourth psalm must first to some extent be passed through, so that we see that all our help lies in the Lord, or we shall never reach to the grand positiveness of this one hundred and twenty-fifth, and sing, "They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion."

We have heard some of the brave expressions of Christian heroes, and we have thought, "I wish I could speak with that man's faith." Brother, to possess such faith you must take with it its owner's

trials. You may rest assured that God never gave a pennyworth of faith to any man that it might be hoarded in a cupboard; faith is sure to be used, and what is more, great faith is not possessed by those who are untrained in its need and use; it is a sword which is not girt upon a man till he hath come to years and strength to use it. I do greatly joy in that utterance of Luther when going to Worms. Some of his friends told him that he would be burned to powder, as Huss had been before him, but he laughed, and said he had no fear. "If," said he, "they shall build a fire between Wittenberg, and Worms that should reach to heaven, in the Lord's name I would appear, and step into behemoth's mouth, between his great teeth, and confess Christ, and let him do his pleasure." His joy at that time seems to have been overflowing, though his danger was manifest to all. Now, this holy boasting sounds well, but it is not to be imitated by every babe in grace; this man had passed through a preparatory process which brought his mind into a triumphant state, in which he was a king of men, a lion among a pack of dogs. It is not to be forgotten that there was a subsequent sinking of his soul, as in the case of Elijah, to prevent his being exalted above measure at the recollection of his own courage. For this, also, he who would have a right royal faith must stand prepared. They that do business in great waters must sail in ships fitted for stormy seas. You and I, perhaps, paddle around the shores of a quiet lake, where our little boat is large enough for most purposes; we are not tested by great storms, neither is our boat held by great anchors; our needs are not of the greatest, and therefore our supplies are not like those of the larger craft, which sail upon greater waters. Still, one would wish to be among the Lord's most useful servants, and to that end would cheerfully accept the great risk. We would not wish to remain babes, but we desire to become full-grown men, and surely he is one who has drank up the one hundred and twenty-fourth psalm as a somewhat bitter cup, and then feels that he can dine upon the one hundred and twenty-fifth, and rise to bless the Lord, who makes his people to "be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever."

Note that the metaphor which is used in the text was drawn by the pilgrims from the hill before them; or, if the psalm does not belong to pilgrims, but to all Israel, they took the comparison from that mountain with which they were best acquainted. If they might not all see Lebanon, which lay at the northern extremity of the land, if they might not all behold the excellency of Carmel, or gaze upon the heights of Hermon, yet once in the year they must all look upon Zion, "whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel." The emblem was therefore a familiar one, and I wish sometimes that we were more apt at sanctifying to holy uses the common objects which are round about us: these streets and houses, our own country, and our own home. I am afraid our eyes are open when we seek emblems of sadness and we find them on every hedge and in any garden-plot; but we should also look at home when we want metaphors of thanksgiving with which to set forth our security and our comfort in the Lord. To have a house at all is something. Cold blows the wind, but warm is our own fireside; and even so "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations." All you who love your homes may see in them the figure and representation

of your dwelling in God in peace for ever. Believing Englishmen, you may specially bless God that your country gives you an admirable picture of your own security. You dwell alone, separated by the floods from all other nations: this is the security of our beloved isle.

“He bade the ocean round thee flow,
Not bars of brass could guard thee so.”

They that trust in the Lord shall be as these happy islands, which shall not know the rod of the oppressor, for the Lord has guarded them with a better defence than walls or bulwarks. Hebrew comparisons were most fit for Hebrew believers, let us make English figures out of our own circumstances and surroundings; thus will it appear as if our faith were less a tradition and more truly a present-day reality; thus also will true religion wear a more real and homely aspect, and will strike others with greater force. Faith, when she is active and observant, finds illustrations of her own blessedness all around. Amid the descending snows of this cheerless wintery day she says, “Did he not say that *cold* and heat, and summer and *winter* should never cease?” Have we not his covenant with the earth still fulfilled before our eyes, and may we not rest certain therefore that the covenant with his people will not fail? Are not these snow-flakes tokens of his word which cometh not forth in vain? Does not this bitter chill assure us of his omnipotence of whom we read, “He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold?” Open your eyes, my brethren, and look about, and as the believing Israelite saw Zion and began to sing about it, so shall you also “go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing.”

Now, to come to the text,—I have merely touched its angles in this rough preface. We have in the verse before us first of all *a lowly people*—“They that trust in the Lord”; one talks a good deal about them, yet they are of no reputation among men: secondly, *a singular stability* in them—“they shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever”; and then, thirdly, we shall for a while consider *the evident reason* for this stability of theirs.

I. First, here we read of A LOWLY PEOPLE. That which is said of them is nothing very great in the judgment of human reason, they are merely said to “*trust in the Lord.*” This is a very simple thing to do. God gives promises, and they believe them. God is at work in providence, and they trust him: God invites them to the mercy-seat, and they approach it; God gives them his Son as their salvation, and they believe in him; God grants his Holy Spirit as their teacher, and they learn of him and obey him. To sum up all in one, they “trust in the Lord.” “That is a small matter,” cries one; “any fool can do that.” Just so: perhaps more would do so if the most of men were not foolishly wise. Any child can trust; and more would trust in the Lord if more men were childlike. “Trust in the Lord.” It needs no effort of intellect to trust, and it needs no laborious education to learn the way; trusting in the Lord is simply depending where there is unquestionable reason for reliance, believing what is assuredly true, and acting upon it. Trusting in the Lord is taking at his word one who cannot lie, or change, or fail; and certainly this is no great feat if we look at it from the carnal man’s

own point of view. These trusters in the Lord cannot plume themselves upon the feat they have performed, for to trust in the Lord would naturally seem to be one of the commonplaces of human thought. Should not a being trust its Creator? Strange that any creature should think it difficult! Sure sign of the depravity of our race that we not only think it difficult, but find it so: sure evidence of how much Satan has bewitched the human mind that simple faith has even become impossible to unrenewed hearts, though it be in itself the easiest exercise of the mind. Men cannot even understand what trusting in the Lord means till God the Holy Ghost opens their understandings, and then he must both beget and nourish their faith, or they will have none of it.

To trust in the Lord we have admitted to be a very simple matter, but at the same time it is *very right*. Is it not? Poor simpletons that we are, we can appeal even to the wise ones of the earth and let them be judges in this matter. Should not a man trust in his own Creator? Is it possible for us to discover a being more worthy of confidence than our own God? Does he not deserve to be trusted? In what one respect has he ever played us false? Is there a single instance in which the word of the Lord, once given, has been found to fail? When have thirsty mouths resorted to this fountain and found it dry? If there be anything against the veracity of God, let us hear it. Evidence is invited. The Lord himself bids any testify against him who have aught to declare. Lo, these thousands of years have rolled along, and Jehovah has challenged men to bring forth their strong arguments against him if they could, but they have found no cause why he should be distrusted, and his word dishonoured. If then there be new evidence, O unbelievers, ye are here to declare it. Let us hear it. There is none; ye know that there is none. Surely it is a matter of clear honesty and right to any man to trust him till he has deceived us or afforded us cause for suspicion. We always say we will trust the bridge that has carried us safely over. Has not the Lord been faithful to those who have trusted him? What say the trusters of former times, or of this present? Lives there one who will come forward and say, "I have trusted in the Lord and have been confounded; I have stayed myself upon the Eternal, and I have found him false"? No, hell itself contains not one adversary of God who dares to utter such a calumny against his divine faithfulness. Well, brethren, if we be told that our trust is simple, we will be reconciled to the statement by the equally manifest fact that it is right.

Moreover, is it not *wise*? What can be wiser? Those of us who have tried trusting in God have never found it fail, whereas when we have trusted in men we have been disappointed. You who have been self-reliant must have found self-reliance to be, at certain times, a terrible mistake; but those who are God-reliant have never found an instance in which their rest in the Lord has been a questionable policy. Would it not be an awfully grand fact if a man should make a failure of his life, and could then turn round and truly say, "Oh God, the cause of my failure was that I trusted alone in thee, and thou couldst not, or wouldst not help me"? As there is a terrible grandeur in the infamous wickedness of Milton's Satan, so much of grandeur that sometimes the reader has been made forgetful of the vileness of the fiend in the greatness of

the rebel, so there would be a sort of appalling splendour about a being who should have implicitly lived to God and depended upon him, and then should have failed. The idea is next door to blasphemous, and tremblingly I let it pass before you that you may perceive that it can have no real existence. Borrowing a poetic license, I have shadowed it, but I know it to be utterly impossible. See, then, how certain of success is the believer ! How impossible it is that he should make shipwreck ! The mere notion of it has passed before you, and you have rejected it as worse than absurd. It must be wise to link yourself to him whose name is Love. To get that little boat of yours in tow with the Infinite must be wise ! To gain some kind of connection between yourself, the creature of an hour, and the Eternal, who looked the world into existence, and whose glance will return it to nothing, must be wise. It must be a grandly wise thing to be joined unto the Lord God, and there is no link that can at the first be cast between God and sinful man but that of simple confidence : be that link ours at this moment and for ever. Blessed are they that by the Holy Ghost have been led to trust in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us speak further about these simple people,—these half fools, as the world thinks them to be. They came to trust in God as a matter of necessity, they could do no otherwise. Why is it that numbers of people deal with their friends on trust ? It is because no other way is open to them. Matthew Henry says, “ All that deal with God must deal upon trust, and he will give comfort to those only that give credit to him.” We cannot bring the Lord our merits, but let us give him our confidence. Because we are poor, let us appeal to his riches ; because we cannot help ourselves, let us cast ourselves upon his power. What else can we do ? God is to be trusted : let us trust him with all our hearts. Do other trusts invite us ? Let us reject them, for we remember the past heart-breaks which they have caused us. Lord, we trust in thee, and come to cast ourselves upon thee ! To whom else can we go ? Thou hast the words of eternal life. Oftentimes trust is to a believer his only path, he is shut up to faith ; he must believe or die. He is pushed up in a corner, he is bewildered, he can scarce pray, he cannot comprehend himself, nor lift a finger ; and now trusting is the resort of his desperation ; it is not his choice, but the fruit of compulsion. Brethren, I feel it a sweet thing to faint away into faith. Did you ever do that ? Were you ever so far gone that at last you have melted right away from yourself, and sunk into God ? I believe that this swooning faintness is the door of faith to multitudes of souls ; they enter into peace, not by strength, but by sheer weakness : they do not run into the arms of God, but they fall there. There are doubtless some who run to Christ, for we read of one who came running unto him ; but there are others who must needs be dropped down before him upon a bed. It matters not how they come to Jesus, so long as they do come to him ; yet it is worthy of note that faith in many cases is a child of weakness ; on its human side it is a Jabez, borne with sorrow, the birth of self's expiring pang.

Yet faith which thus arises out of very weakness, like the phoenix from its own ashes, has a great side to it. It is, in some respects, the sublimest effort of the human mind. If ever the bright spirits which stand before the throne test their own faculties upon the mysteries of

providence, foreknowledge, predestination, and the free will of man,—if they ever enquire where the agency of the created ends and where the divine is found alone,—if ever, I say, they try the edge of their intellect upon themes like these, they make an end by declaring, “We are lost, our spirits cannot comprehend the infinite, but we believe in God, and are sure that he ordereth all things aright.” They doff their coronets before the throne of their superior King, in reverent confidence in his eternal goodness: this is their grandest worship, their truest adoration,—they do believe. Brethren, faith is not of earth alone, but saints and angels in heaven believe in the Eternal God. It were a crime to suspect them of the contrary. The mystery of Jehovah’s dealings still manifests their faith; they remember his unfulfilled promises, and they look for their accomplishment, for they have not as yet seen the Bridegroom coming to his bride, nor the earth subdued unto his sway, nor the full manifestation of the creation, when the sons of God shall be revealed, and the creature itself shall cease from its groaning. Trust is the simplicity of a babe, but it is the glory of a genius; it is grand in seraph or in saint, and while it befits a child it is worthy of an archangel. Poor fools these trusters are, yet are they near akin to nobler beings.

Now, can you tell me why is it that if a man trusts in God he is generally despised by his fellows? If a person were to say, “As for my getting on in the world, I am trusting to a friend of mine who is influential with the government”; or if another said, “My father was born before me, and he will see me provided for,” nobody would condemn either of such persons as an idiot, but would treat his confidence as quite legitimate; but if any one of us were to say, “Our confidence, as for our future in this world is resting in our heavenly Father,” there would be a shrugging of the shoulders, a knowing look of the eyes, and when they got far enough away our critics would say, “That man is a fool, or a cant.” Alas, God is nobody to the bulk of mankind, and it seems a ridiculous thing to them to trust in him. To trust in God is to the worldly man the next thing to building castles in the air. The unbelieving laugh, because they cannot understand us: but what is the reason why they become angry with us? Why do they turn again and rend us? Other simpletons they let alone, but those who trust in God become objects of scorn. The believer finds that a jest is made upon his faith, and mirth is excited by his confidence: what he says is widely retailed, and more than a little distorted, and he is looked upon as little better than a natural fool. This always was so, and always will be so till the Lord cometh. He that is born after the flesh persecuteth him that is born after the Spirit. The man who walks by sight cannot understand the man who walks by faith; how should he? And if we get to trust in God, and that trust becomes the great motive power of our life, as I earnestly hope it may be with each one of us, then the worldly man will not know how to make head or tail of our conduct, and he will first of all ridicule, and then oppose. Care nothing for the opposition; he who is right has conquered.

Before we proceed further, let us notice how the text includes all who truly trust in the Lord, both small and great, for it says, “They that trust in the Lord.” It does not say, “They that trust in the Lord with a highly intelligent faith.” It is a good thing to understand much, and

to trust in the Lord with growing knowledge, but, dear soul, if you do not know much, yet if you are trusting in the Lord, you shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed. The text does not limit the blessing to those who have great faith. The stronger your faith the better; the more faith you can have the richer and happier your life will be; but the assurance of our text is for those who have any faith, even a mustard seed of faith; they that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion. And note it does not say, "those who have had faith for many years." It is a great thing to have had faith for a long lifetime, it ripens and sweetens; but this promise is made to the youngest as well as to the oldest, to those who have believed in the Master's word for a few years, or months, or days, as well as to the veterans. They that trust in the Lord, though it be only yesterday that they began to trust, shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed. Neither does the text demand a loftiness and heroism of trust, but it simply speaks of the trust itself. Your faith may not be like that of Samson, which slays a thousand men, but it may be a humble, teachable faith, which sits like Mary at the Master's feet at home. Well, you shall be as Mount Zion, that cannot be removed. Only have real trust in God, and you shall have the steadfastness of the sacred hill of the Lord.

Some of you may have been so sweetly taught to trust in the Lord that you can say, "Yes, blessed be his name, I do trust him, altogether, unreservedly, and without a suspicion." Be you abundantly sure that the text is your portion this day. I hope there are some of us who can now trust our Lord in any case. If we do but see the Lord's word in any teaching, however mysterious or obnoxious to flesh and blood, our questions are at an end. We accept unhesitatingly the hard and the deep things of God. If we see any attribute, or promise, or half a promise of our Lord to be on our side, we feel more than safe. A good old saint who lately lay dying, told her pastor that she was resting upon *the justice* of God. The good divine thought that she had chosen a strange point of the divine character to rest on, but it was not at all so, for she explained herself. "I rest in his justice to my great Surety and Substitute, that he would not let him die for me in vain." Thus hard, stern justice becomes a blessed pillow for our confidence, and none can be softer for a dying head. Though justice be as a stone, yet he that can use it as Jacob used the stone at Bethel shall see the ladder which reached to heaven, and angels trooping upon its rounds. Awkward providences, too, like stern attributes, we have learned to use for helps in our trusting. It happened that Rabbi Joshua was walking up mount Zion one day with his brother, Rabbi Eliezer, and as they walked along they started a fox, which ran out from among the rubbish. "Alas, my brother," said Joshua, "this is a sad sign; does it not show us the anger of the Lord against Israel? He hath given Zion to be a desolation, and the foxes walk about her." Eliezer replied, "True, my brother; but doth it not also prove the faithfulness of Jehovah towards Zion, for inasmuch as he said that the foxes should go about her when she sinned, hath he not also said that he will build her walls again? If he is thus faithful to his threatening, will he not in due time fulfil his promise?" Brethren, you must trust the Lord wholly and entirely, in everything and concerning everything. "Trust in him at all times." You must

trust the dark side of him, you must trust in the shadow of his wings as well as in the light of his countenance. Some of you have only learned to trust to the smile of his face, you must learn to trust in the blows of his fist. God bring us to that! "No," say you, "we can never come to that." Surely we can, for did not one of old say, "Though he slay me yet will I trust in him"? That is precisely what we mean.

II. Under our second head we shall consider the grand privilege of the text, **THE SECURITY OF BELIEVERS**,—" *They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.*" Mount Zion had in David's day undergone a great many changes, and it has seen many more since, but it has never been removed. There it was when the Jebusite defied David, there it was when Araunah threshed his wheat, there it was when the temple gleamed in the sun, there it was when the Roman soldier cast the firebrand into the holy place, and it is there now: it has never been removed, and it never will be. God's children undergo a variety of experiences. To-day their hearts are a place of sacrifice, and to-morrow a battle-field; by turns their soul is a temple and a threshing-floor; but whatever their ups and downs may be, they shall never be removed from their ordained and appointed place: by the grace of God they are where they are, and where they shall be.

They shall never be effectually removed from that place before the Lord in which infinite love has fixed them. Where, then, are believers? We answer first, they are in the place of *justification*. As soon as they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, they were justified by faith. How many years have passed since then? Never mind,—“there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” They have not fallen into the place of condemnation; they have not been driven from the honourable position of justified men, for “the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” The Lord has covered them with the righteousness of Christ, and cast all their sins into the depths of the sea, and therefore they must and they shall stand in his favour as long as Zion's famous rock abides in its place. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.” “He that believeth on him is not condemned.” The sheep of Christ shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand.

The believer is also in the place of *regeneration*, and out of that condition he shall never be removed. He was born again; prove that fact, and there is no reversing it. He that is born again is born again. You cannot take from a man his first birth, neither can you take from a man his second birth: the thought is ridiculous, the fact is impossible. Art thou a child of God? Thou art a child of God, and thou canst never be other than a child of God, either in time or in eternity. Hast thou a child? Thou mayest disown him, but he is thine none the less. Your child may be rebellious, and his character may make thee sorrowful, but he is thy child for all that. Unchild him thou canst not. Even so, if God be my Father, which I know he is, since he has taught me to trust in him, then I may not question the perpetuity of my sonship, since it is an abiding thing, and I shall no more be removed from it than Mount Zion from its ancient seat.

Where is the believer? He is in the place of *the gracious purpose*,—"for whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to

the image of his Son." Being called, my brother, thou art a believer, for that is the mark of the heavenly calling; therefore be thou sure that thou wast foreknown, and predestinated, and be thou equally certain that from this predestination thou shalt no more be removed than the mountains shall be torn from their sockets, and thrown into the depths of the sea.

Thou art also in the place of *divine love*, dear to the heart of God, for the Father himself loveth you, and nothing shall make him cease to love you. He did not love you because of anything good in you. When he chose you he knew what you would be; you will never surprise him whatever evil you fall into, for he has foreseen and provided for it all, and he hath said, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee; for the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."

Beloved, if thou be indeed trusting in God thou art in the stronghold of *the covenant*. God hath entered into bonds with thee to bless thee. By oath and promise, by two immutable things in which it is impossible for him to lie, he hath given thee strong consolation concerning everlasting salvation in Christ Jesus; and thou art like Mount Zion, thou shalt never be removed from thy place in the covenant. Although thy house be not so with God as thou mightest desire, yet hath he made with thee an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure.

What is thy position? Why, thou art *in Christ*, one with thy Lord and Head, a living member of his body. Thou art a part of the mystical Christ, and none shall dismember the Only-begotten, or rend in pieces the Lord of all. It can never be that he shall lose a single limb of his own august membership. Till Mount Zion shall be torn from its eternal base none who are in Christ shall ever be rent away from him. In this truth there is something to feed upon. Here is a downy couch of precious consolation to lie upon when you are sick, and a garden of delights to walk in when health returns. Here is meat for men, in the strength of which we may do, and dare, and die for our Lord.

"They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which can never be removed, but which abideth for ever." This shall not only be a matter of fact as to the believer's actual position with God, but to a large extent this shall be true in his own consciousness as he advances in the life and walk of faith. Believers are too often tossed about in their minds, and suffer great shakings and movings of heart because they do not trust in the Lord as they should. These things ought not to be, for we ought to be steadfast and immovable; but by reason of infirmity and immaturity many are tossed to and fro as with a tempest. Still, even in these, deep in their soul their faith is earnestly keeping its hold, and does not permit them altogether to drift. At the back of a great deal of grievous unbelief, when we are in a depressed condition, there lives a faith which is not moved, but in secret takes hold as for dear life, biding its time till better days shall come. I remember another story of Martin Luther, which may fitly be told in this place. Great-souled Martin Luther could believe and doubt against any man of his time; in believing he could excel the angels, and in horrible thoughts

of doubting he could almost match the devils. Great-hearted men are subject to horrible fits of faintness and despair, unknown to minds of smaller calibre. One day he fell so low in spirit that his friends were frightened at what he might say or do. Things were going ill with the great cause, and the Reformer might in his dreadful condition have upset everything. So his friends got him out of the way, saying to themselves, "The man must be alone, his brain is over-worked, he must be quiet." He rested a bit, and came back, looking as sour and gloomy as ever. Rest and seclusion had not stilled the winds nor lulled the waves. Luther was still in a storm, and judged that the good cause was shipwrecked. I will now give you my own version of the method adopted for the great man's cure. He went home, but when he came to the door nobody welcomed him. He entered their best room, and there sat Catherine his wife, all dressed in black, weeping as from a death in the house. By her side lay a mourning cloak, such as ladies wear at funerals. "Ah," says he, "Kate, what matters now, is the child dead?" She shook her head and said the little ones were alive, but something much worse than that had happened. Luther cried "Oh, what has befallen us? Tell me quick! I am sad enough as it is. Tell me quick!" "Good man," said she, "have you not heard? Is it possible that the terrible news has not reached you?" This made the Reformer the more inquisitive and ardent, and he pressed to be immediately told of the cause of sorrow. "Why," said Kate, "have you not been told that our heavenly Father is dead, and his cause in the world is therefore overturned?" Martin stood and looked at her, and at last burst into such a laugh that he could not possibly contain himself, but cried, "Kate, I read thy riddle,—what a fool I am! God is not dead, he ever lives, but I have acted as if he were. Thou hast taught me a good lesson." It is only by realizing the everlasting, abiding love of God that they that trust in the Lord shall come to feel steadfast as mount Zion which shall never be removed. The man of God may know that he is safe, and yet there may be such a rush and tumult in his experience that he may not be able to understand himself or realize his true position. This may happen even to more advanced believers; but as we grow in grace the tendency is to reach a more even and equable condition. Experienced believers are not to be put about by every puff of wind; nay, they come at last to hold on their way in the teeth of all ill weathers, and like hardy mariners, make small account of the lesser storms of life. It is grand to gaze into the face of a patriarch who wears written on his placid brow the words, "He shall not be moved for ever. His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." Such men are the pillars of society, and help poor trembling, doubting hearts to hope that there is something stable yet. Let it be our object and desire to grow into such confirmed and established believers. The promise of God deserves unwavering faith, and why should we not render it, and thus become fixed in our repose of soul.

Once more, while it is delightful to consider the actual immoveability of the believer, and most profitable to seek after a growing establishment of faith, there is one point of fixity which we have already, and can never allow a question to be raised about. As to the gospel which we believe and teach, we are once for all fixed and settled about it: our creed is not a variable quantity, or a shifting cloud. We know whom

we have believed, and are as fixed as Mount Zion as to the eternal verities upon which our hopes are built. Since we have trusted in the Lord we have at times felt that we did not just then derive the support and the comfort that we expected from it, but what then? Shall we leave it and look elsewhere? God forbid! We are at a pass with all the world of doubters, thinkers, philosophizers, and scientific dreamers; we know enough of the truth of the gospel to be resolved to hold it against legions of their order. We defy alike the council of infidels, and the hell of devils, we never will depart from the grand old gospel which we have received. No, my brethren, at the very worst, our gospel is better than their modern thought at the best. I would sooner drink the dregs of the wine vat of Christ when the berries are sour than I would quaff the sweetest wines on the lees well refined which come of the vintage of unbelief. We are sure and positive in our faith in God and in his infallible word. O unbelievers, we are in no degree moved from the certainty of our confidence by the depression of our spirits. You may catch us sometimes in the dumps, and say, "Now you find the gospel does not cheer you as you thought it would." But our answer is ready for you; we believe the gospel, whether it is yielding us present comfort or no. We would sooner be God's dogs than the devil's darlings, and we would sooner feed on the husks of the gospel, if such there be, than on the finest of your wheat. Having learned to trust in the Lord, we are as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but which abideth for ever. As to the essential truth of the gospel, we defy the world in arms.

III. Now I have to finish. In the third place, let us consider THE EVIDENT REASON for all this. Why is it that they that trust in the Lord shall not be moved?

Why, first, because *they are trusting in the truth*. They have not believed a lie, and therefore they shall not be swept from their foundation. They are trusting in One who will not deceive them and cannot fail them. They have laid their foundation on a rock, have they not? If they had trusted to man, man would fail or change, but, lo, they are trusting to One who is truth, power, immutability, holiness, justice—why should they be moved? I cannot imagine a reason. I say again, why should they be moved?

They are trusting where their reliance is observed and welcomed. God loveth to have many dependents about him. It is his way of revealing himself and manifesting his glory. In these later ages, know you not what the Lord has been doing? He dwelt up yonder self-contained—God, Father, Son, Holy Ghost, within his own supreme Person, self-sufficient. He wanted nothing more, and if he willed aught beyond it was that there might be creatures that could trust him, love him, hang upon him, depend upon him. He went about in creation, and in providence and in grace to make dependents. A great nobleman with a big house in a wide country is not content to be all alone, he needs servants and tenantry; and if he be of a generous spirit he seeks the poor. He wants poor neighbours to help, and he says, "This Christmas time I must give something away—is there nobody wanting a round of beef? Is there nobody wanting their chimney set alight with a joint? Is there nobody needing a blanket in this cold season?" Thus God must have dependents, he must have those about him who need him. He

loves dependents, and I do not see why he should cast them away. Why should he? If this is what he desireth, if he seeketh such to worship him, who believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him, why should he reject their suit?

It is not the nature of God to cast away any who rely upon him; on the contrary, he is very careful that faith should never have less than she has expected. He respects the courage of faith: he never confounds it. If you open your back door, and a robin comes bravely in out of the cold, do you drive him out? No, you are pleased with his assurance, and give him a hearty welcome. Even so doth God deal with poor trembling souls when they come to him. We read of Charles V., the German Emperor, that when a pair of birds had built their nest among the poles and lines of his pavilion he would not allow it to be removed though the time was come for the camp to be on the march. The birds had trusted to him, and they should not be disappointed. The like zealous care doth the Lord exhibit towards the trembling hopes and feeble confidences of poor souls that trust in him. There is, therefore, no reason why they should be removed, since it is not like the Lord to cast them away.

Once more, *for a true believer to be suffered to perish would be a violation of all the promises of God. He hath said to such "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." His own word is, "the righteous shall hold on his way," "he that believeth in him shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end." Now then, if these promises could fail, the child of God would be removed; but it is not possible so long as God is God that he who trusts in the Lord shall ever be removed. As long as there is a God in heaven every believer is safe. Let him go and rejoice in this:—because it will bring glory to God to save him, but for him to be lost would put a slur upon the name of the Most High. The Lord bring us to a simple faith in Jesus, and keep us fixed there. Amen.*

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalms cxxiv.,
cxxv. cxxvi.

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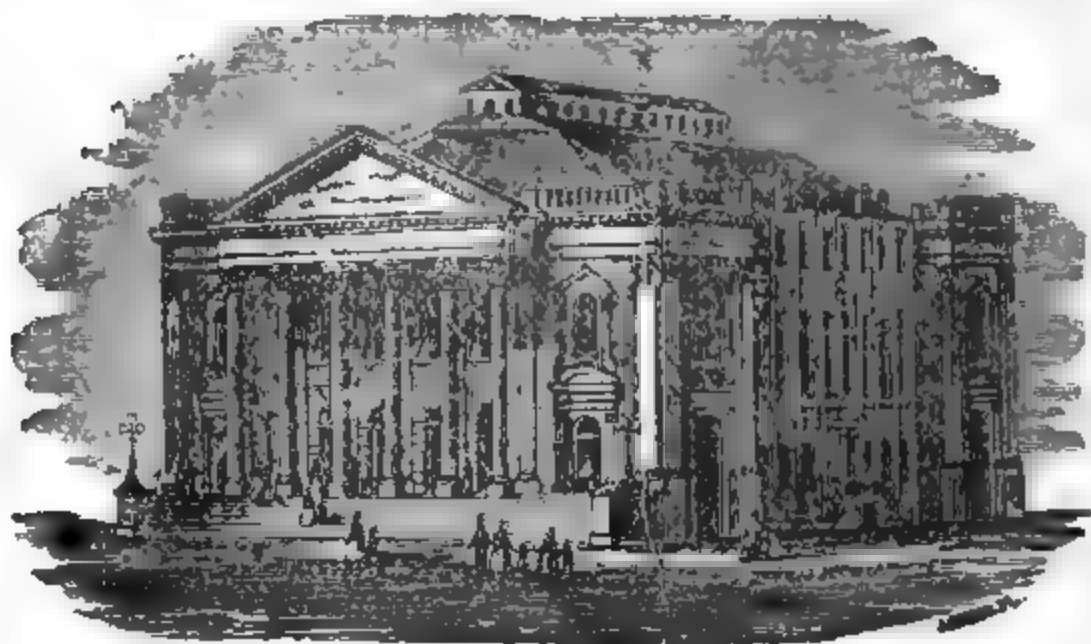
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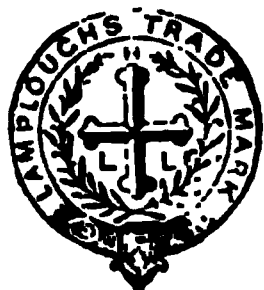
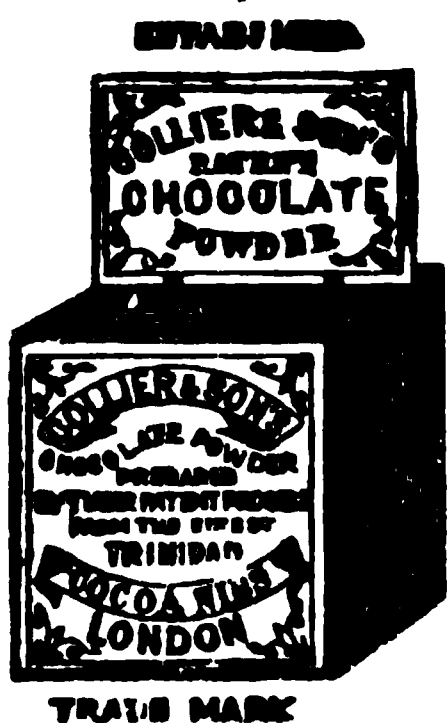
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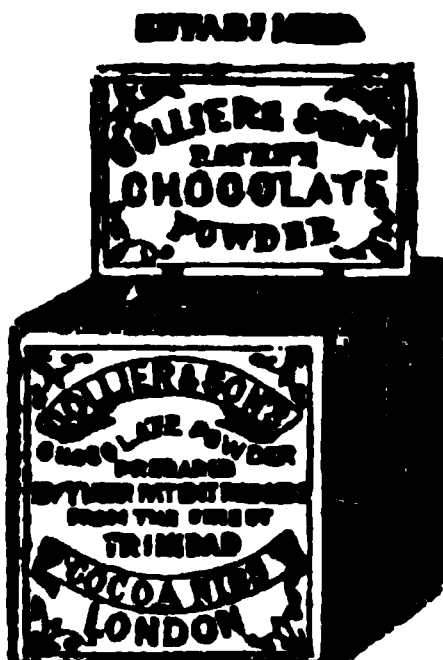
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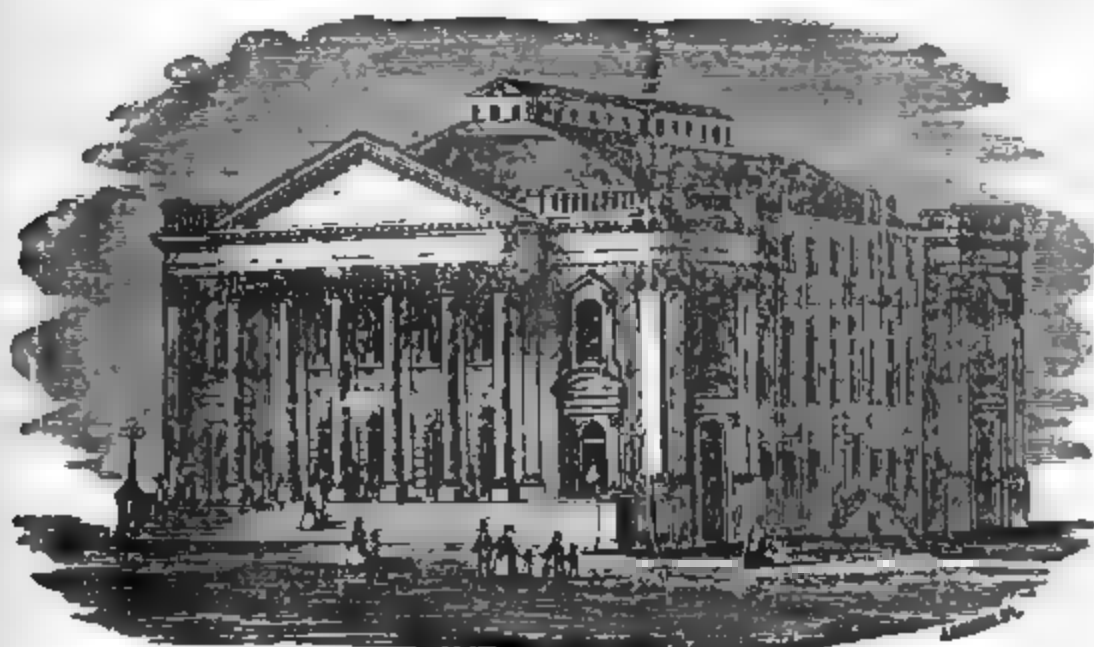
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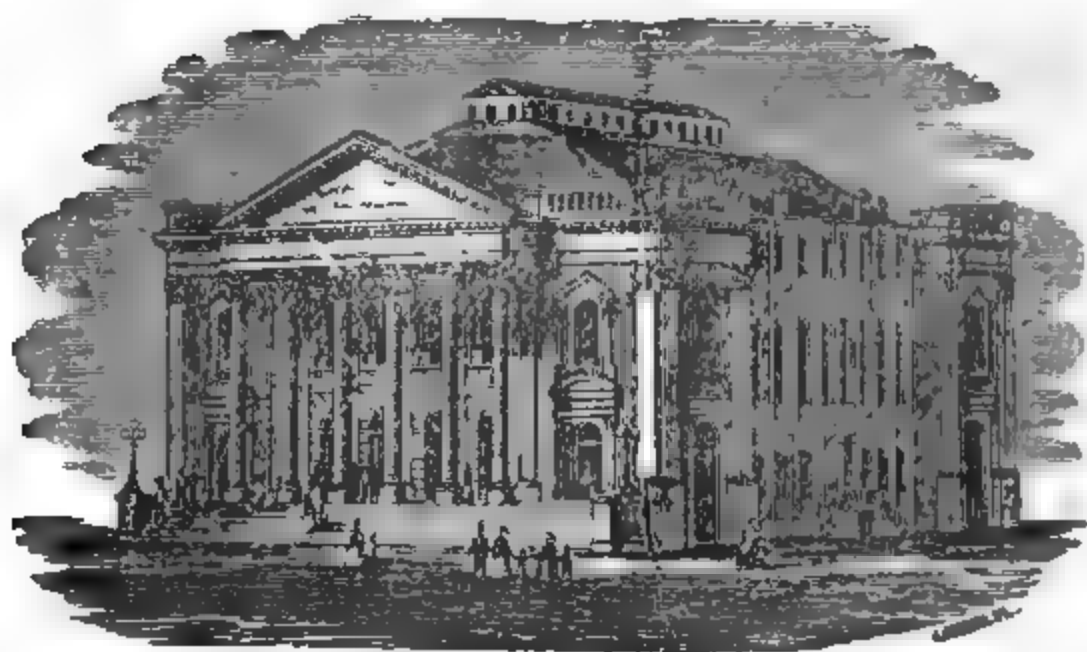
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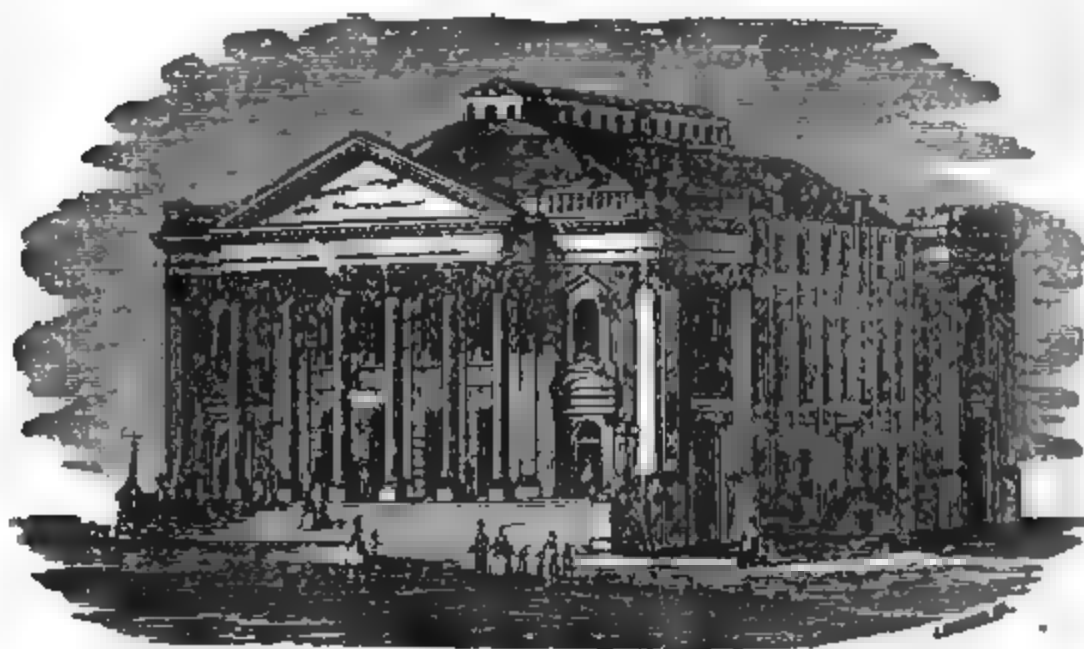
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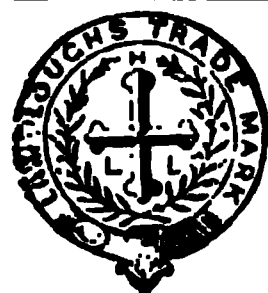
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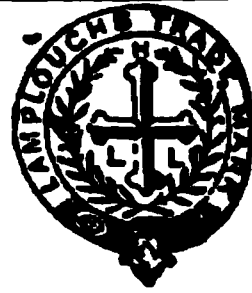
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Do. do. out of the United Kingdom	—	—	—
Loans on the Company's Policies	17,908	14	5
Investments—			
In British Government Securities	4,609	7	6
Indian and Colonial Government Securities	58,601	14	1
Foreign Government do.	—	—	—
Railway and other debentures and debenture stocks	—	—	—
Do. shares (preference and ordinary)	8,110	2	8
House property	8,829	3	9
Other investments—			
Ground Rents*	296,170	8	0
Loans upon personal security	—	—	—
Agents' balances	27,505	18	10
Outstanding premiums	—	—	—
Do. interest	—	—	—
Cash—			
On deposit	£8,000 10 7		
In hand and on current account	2,879 19 8		
	10,880	10	3
Other assets—			
Loans to clerks	93	3	6
Furniture, Fittings, &c.	1,000	0	0
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"We have received the Twenty-third Annual Report of the 'BRITISH EQUITABLE ASSURANCE COMPANY,' than which there is none enjoys a better deserved confidence."—*Weekly Review*.

A copy of the new Report—containing full Particulars of the proceedings at the Twenty-third Annual Meeting—forwarded on application to the OFFICE, or to the Agents; also Particulars of Two Thousand Death Claims paid by the Company.

INFLUENTIAL AGENTS WANTED.

N.B.—No payment made to any agent or other person will be deemed a payment made to or for the Company unless the party making such payment obtain a receipt signed by the Manager or Sub-Manager for the same.

DR. J. COLLIS BROWNE'S CHLORODYNE, THE ORIGINAL AND ONLY GENUINE.

ADVICE TO INVALIDS.—If you wish to obtain quiet refreshing sleep, free from headache, relief from pain and anguish, to calm and assuage the weary aching of protracted disease, invigorate the nervous media, and regulate the circulating systems of the body, you will provide yourself with that marvellous remedy discovered by Dr. J. COLLIS BROWNE, Member of the College of Physicians, London, to which he gave the name of

CHLORODYNE,

and which is admitted by the Profession to be the most wonderful and valuable remedy ever discovered.

CHLORODYNE is the best remedy known for Coughs, Consumption, Bronchitis, Asthma.

CHLORODYNE effectually checks and arrests those too often fatal diseases—Diphtheria, Fever, Croup, Ague.

CHLORODYNE acts like a charm in diarrhoea, and is the only specific in Cholera and Dysentery.

CHLORODYNE effectually cuts short all attacks of Epilepsy, Hysteria, Palpitation, and Spasms.

CHLORODYNE is the only palliative in Neuralgia, Rheumatism, Gout, Cancer, Toothache, Meningitis, &c.

From Dr. B. J. BOUTON & Co, Horncastle:

We have made pretty extensive use of Chlorodyne in our practice lately, and look upon it as an excellent direct Sedative and Anti-spasmodic. It seems to allay pain and irritation in whatever organ, and from whatever cause. It induces a feeling of comfort and quietude not obtainable by any other remedy, and it seems to possess this great advantage over all other Sedatives, that it leaves no unpleasant after-effects.

Earl Russell communicated to the College of Physicians that he had received a dispatch from Her Majesty's Consul at Manilla, to the effect that Cholera had been raging fearfully, and that the ONLY remedy of any service was CHLORODYNE.—See *Lancet*, December 31, 1864.

CAUTION—BEWARE OF PIRACY AND IMITATIONS.—CAUTION—Vice-Chancellor Sir W. Page Wood stated that Dr. J. Collis Browne was, undoubtedly, the Inventor of Chlorodyne; that the story of the defendant, Freeman, was deliberately untrue, which, he regretted to say, had been sworn to.—See *Times*, July 13, 1864

Sold in Bottles at 1s. 1½d., 2s. 9d., and 4s. 6d. None genuine without the words, "Dr. J. COLLIS BROWNE'S CHLORODYNE," on the Government Stamp. Overwhelming Medical Testimony accompanies each bottle.

SOLE MANUFACTURER:

J. T. Davenport, 33, Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury, London.

FRAMPTON'S PILL OF HEALTH.

THIS FAMILY MEDICINE is the most effective remedy for indigestion, bilious and liver complaints.

For **FEMALES** these Pills are truly excellent, removing headache, depression of spirits, dulness of sight, nervous affections, blotches, pimples, and sallowness of the skin, and giving a healthy bloom to the complexion. Sold by all Chemists, at 1s. 1½d. and 2s. 9d. per box.

BORWICK'S GOLD MEDAL BAKING POWDER.

Has been awarded **FOUR GOLD MEDALS** for its superiority over all others. Makes Delicious Bread, Plum Puddings, and all kinds of Pastry light, sweet, and digestible. Sold everywhere in 1d., 2d., 4d., and 6d. packets, and 6d., 1s., 2s. 6d., and 5s. boxes. Schools, Families, and Hotels should purchase the 2s. 6d. or 5s. size, as there is a considerable saving.

CLARKE'S

WORLD FAMED

BLOOD MIXTURE.

Is warranted to cleanse the blood from all impurities from whatever cause arising. For Scrofula, Scurvy, Sores of all kinds, Skin and Blood Diseases, its effects are marvellous. Thousands of Testimonials from all parts. In bottles 2s. 6d. each, and in cases of six times the quantity, 11s. each, of all chemists. Sent to any address for 30 or 132 stamps by the Proprietor,

F. J. CLARKE,

Chemist, Apothecaries' Hall, Lincoln. London Depot 150, Oxford Street.

PAGE WOODCOCK'S WIND PILLS

certainly of their action, commend them to those who require a Tonic to assist digestion, relieve Wind in the Stomach, exert a special influence on the Liver, and also the peristaltic motion of the Bowels, resulting from Chronic Indigestion and lack of Assimilation. The more my experience in their varied applicability extends, the more their beneficial effects appear, and many households have found a great friend in your preparation, for the promotion of a healthy digestion. Their favourable action are all that could be wished for.

I am, faithfully yours, THOS. FOSTER Esq., Surgeon

Of all Medicine Vendors at 1/6 and 2/6.

Manchester, June 13th, 1877.

To Mr. PAGE D. WOODCOCK, Norwich.

Sir,—I have found your Pills an excellent preparation for the Constipation and Flatulency so common in both sexes. They possess great advantages over other Pills. Their uniformity in strength, the smallness of the dose, and the

ADVERTISEMENTS.

SIX PRIZE MEDALS.

BRYANT & MAY'S

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MATCHES.

SIX PRIZE MEDALS.

THE NEW FAMILY MATCH SAFE for Bryant & May's Patent Safety Matches, supplies a want that has long been felt, and will be adopted at once by all careful housekeepers. It is very ornamental, and made to contain three dozen boxes of Bryant & May's Patent Safety Matches and three of the ornamental metal match cases, and can be obtained from any grocer or oilman, filled & fitted complete, for 2 6. It is strong, & damp proof, & should be found in every store room.



"What nobler end can man attain
Than conquest over human pain?"

A natural way of restoring and preserving health.

Use ENO'S FRUIT SALT.

Prepared from Sound Ripe Fruit.

Without such a simple precaution the jeopardy of life is not only increased.

"I have used your Fruit Salt for many years, and have to state the statement that it is not only REFRESHING and invigorating, but also the double in giving relief in cases of Headache, Stomach, and Constipation and is sold by the following:—*The Century, St. Thomas, Victoria, Australia, and London, 1894.*"

Sold by all Chemists, price 2s. 9d. and 4s. 6d.

CUTION Examine each Bottle and see the Capata is marked "ENO'S FRUIT SALT" Without it you have been imposed on by a Worthless Imitation

"By a thorough knowledge of the natural laws which govern the operations of digestion and nutrition, and by a careful application of the fine properties of well-selected Cocoa, Mr. Epps has provided our breakfast tables with a delicately-flavoured beverage which may save us many heavy doctors' bills. It is by the judicious use of such articles of diet that a constitution may be gradually built up

EPPS'S
GRATEFUL
(JAMES EPPS & Co., Homœopathic Chemists.)
COMFORTING
COCOA.

until strong enough to resist every tendency to disease. Hundreds of subtle maladies are floating around us ready to attack wherever there is a weak point. We may escape many a fatal shaft by keeping ourselves well fortified with pure blood and a properly nourished frame"—*An Diet in the Civil Service, Oct. 11*



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